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LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

A Guide to LGBTQ+ Inclusivity for HR Professionals

A company that values LGBTQ+ inclusivity aims to make every employee feel valued, respected and supported.

Executive Search & Recruitment Specialists

About Sarah Gracie, Associate Director at Eden Scott

Sarah Gracie is an Associate Director with Eden Scott, responsible for the business's Executive Search function. She has over 20 years of recruitment experience across many business areas and has a wealth of experience across senior-level appointments throughout Scotland.

Since 2018, Sarah has managed much of the executive recruitment, mainly focusing on Eden Scott's public sector clients, including Scotland's Housing Associations, various quangos and the NHS.

She has developed a strong understanding of the NHS and its board structure and delivered some critical projects over the past 20 months.

Having worked within the Scottish recruitment market since 1998, Sarah is passionate about delivering excellent customer satisfaction to both the candidate and the client, ensuring the organisations we work with get the inspiring leadership they require.

Sarah Gracie | Associate Director, Eden Scott

Foreword: A Guide to LGBTQ+ Inclusivity for HR Professionals

According to a survey by Stonewall, 35% of LGBTQ+ staff have hidden their identity at work due to fear of discrimination.[1]

A company that values LGBTQ+ inclusivity aims to make every employee feel valued, respected and supported.

In this guide, we'll discuss the importance of inclusivity and how to create a more inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ employees.

At the end of the guide, you'll find a glossary full of frequently-used terms. If you're unfamiliar with LGBTQ+ terminology, you might find it useful to first refer to the glossary before reading the rest of the guide.

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Understanding
LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

The Importance of LGBTQ+ Inclusivity in the Workplace

Every employee deserves to show up as themselves. But for some LGBTQ+ people, showing their true characteristics or sharing personal information can feel risky. That's because they fear discrimination for disclosing their true identity.

A study by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) found that LGBTQ+ workers are more likely to experience unfair treatment at work, with 68% reporting that they have been treated differently.[2]

This can often be a demeaning experience, leading to a lack of focus or motivation at work. Many LGBTQ+ people who face workplace discrimination experience a mental health problem – 55% of trans people report experiencing depression in the past year due to discrimination.[3]

Not only is that unfair to LGBTQ+ employees, it's also bad for business. In the US, reduced productivity caused by LGBTQ+ discrimination has been shown to have a collective annual cost of $9.5billion.[4]

Benefits of an Inclusive Work Environment

Studies show that happier employees are more productive - so it makes sense to help every employee feel comfortable in the workplace.

Diverse workspaces are proven to be more creative and have more effective problem-solving approaches. That's because when you have a range of different perspectives, you are more likely to enjoy a wider pool of solutions.

The best part for businesses? Inclusivity makes you more profitable - businesses with diverse leadership have been found to be more profitable than non-diverse counterparts.[5]

Common Challenges Faced by LGBTQ+ Employees

When we talk about promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion, we might think it's enough to simply state that our companies support the LGBTQ+ community.

But without a proper strategy to support LGBTQ+ employees, the challenges they face can be much more wide-reaching.

Some employees report being refused promotions, career opportunities or benefits. Others report experiencing prejudice, which can often take the form of social exclusion or microaggressions. Others still report mental health challenges caused by intolerant working environments.

To create a working environment in which LGBTQ+ employees feel truly included, we must implement better policies. More on this later.
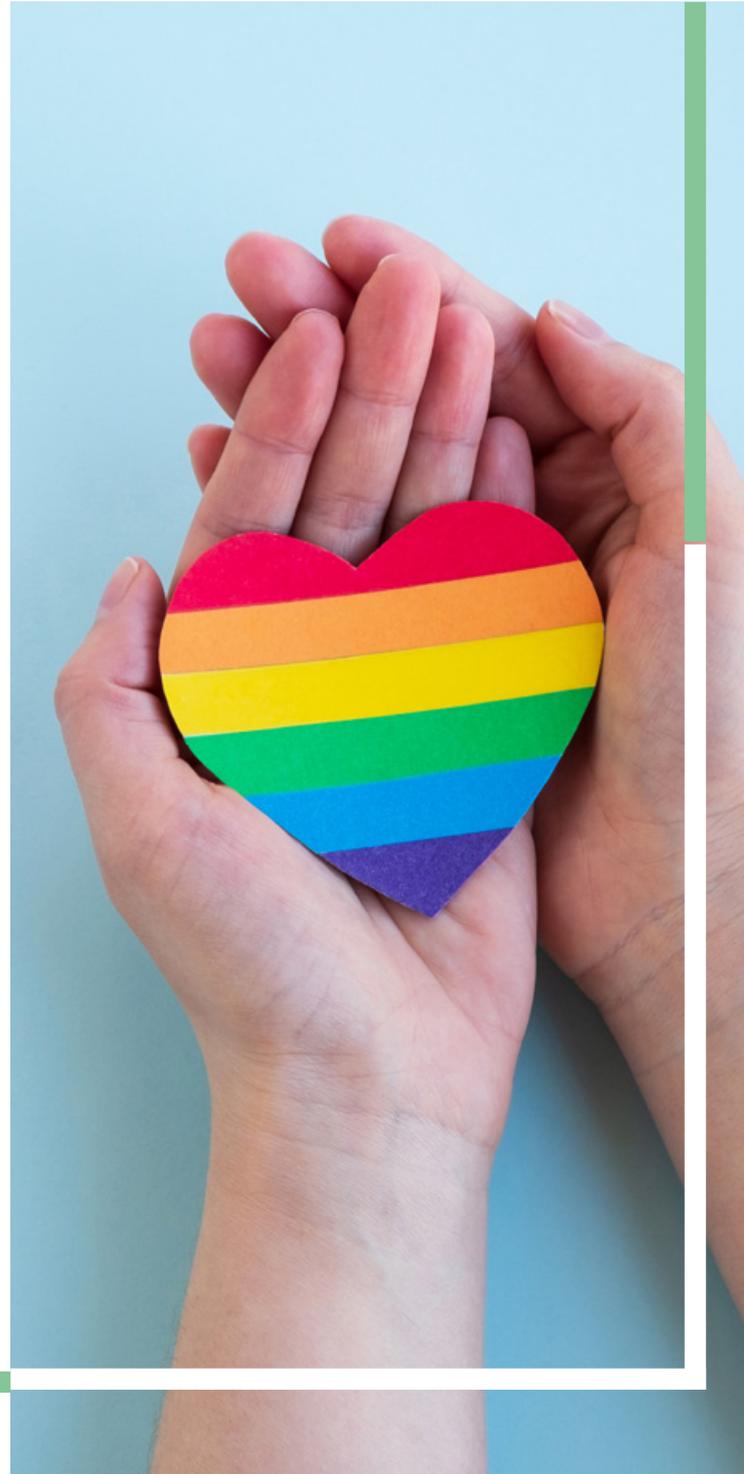
Studies show that happier employees are more productive - so it makes sense to help every employee feel comfortable in the workplace.

Inclusive Hiring Practices
and Unconscious Bias

Unconscious Bias

Everyone holds biases. It's almost unavoidable.

Our brains process so much information so quickly that we need to make generalisations to navigate the world. However, sometimes, these generalisations lead us to develop prejudiced views – or biases.

There are two types of bias: conscious and unconscious (sometimes known as explicit and implicit).

➔ **A conscious bias** is one that we know we hold.

➔ **An unconscious bias** is one that we don't realise we carry with us.

We might hold negative perceptions about a group of people with certain characteristics, but we don't recognise that within ourselves.

How unconscious bias impacts hiring

If interviewers or hiring managers hold an unconscious bias against LGBTQ+ people (or any other group of people), this can impact their judgement when it comes to hiring.

For example, they might consider the way that a person dresses or interacts to be unprofessional when this is not actually the case. Or, they might falsely perceive a candidate to be unqualified or lacking in experience, when the evidence suggests otherwise.

How to spot an unconscious bias

The good news is that we can address both conscious and unconscious biases. To address an unconscious bias, however, we first need to identify it.

Naturally, an unconscious bias is hard to spot. But there are ways that you can help your team reflect on their biases even if they're not immediately aware of them.
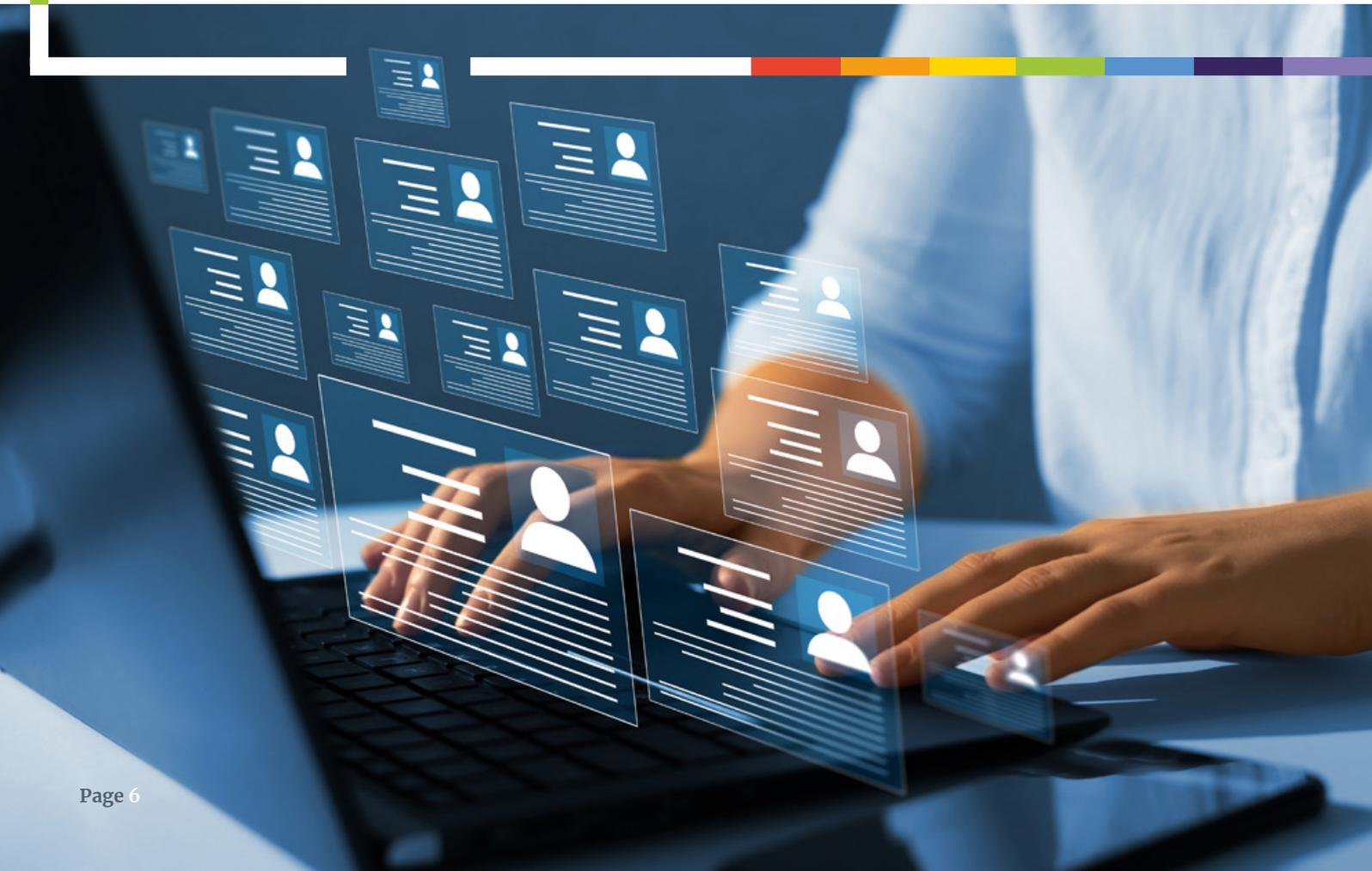
Here's some advice that you might find useful to share with your employees.

a) Having humility

It doesn't feel nice to consider that you might have a bias. Reflecting on your biases can be an uncomfortable experience that can bring up feelings of anger and defensiveness. Remind yourself that that's normal, and that by processing these feelings, you will be closer to your goal of addressing your biases.

b) Distinguishing between 'having' and 'being'

Often, people want to avoid being labelled as biased or prejudiced, and this can prevent them from exploring their biases. But having a prejudice doesn't necessarily make you a 'prejudiced' person.

Reassuring yourself that it's possible to have a bias without that being a terrible reflection of your character can take some of the weight out of exploring unconscious biases.

c) Take an implicit bias test

If you'd like to have a (fairly) objective assessment of your unconscious biases, then you can take an implicit bias test. (Implicit bias is just another way to say unconscious bias).

While these tests aren't always 100% accurate, they are a relatively effective way of helping you identify some of your blind spots.

d) Be mindful

Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings when you interact with others. Try to identify any automatic judgments or assumptions you might make – this could be based on someone's appearance, behaviour or any other set of characteristics.

e) Challenge your assumptions

When you notice an assumption you make, ask yourself whether you are making that assumption based on a stereotype or bias. One way to do this is to ask yourself if there is any real evidence to support your assumption.

How to minimise the impact of unconscious bias in hiring

We can't ever fully eliminate the risk of unconscious bias, but there are steps that HR professionals can take to make the hiring process more inclusive.

a) Build a more diverse candidate pool

When working with a recruitment company, you can specify that you are interested in hearing from candidates from different backgrounds, genders and sexual orientations, including people from the LGBTQ+ community.

Collecting this information can be anonymised – the recruitment company doesn't necessarily need to know this information about specific candidates, just that some members within their candidate pool do have these characteristics. This makes it more likely that you will receive a more diverse candidate shortlist.

b) Creating a point system for interviews

Asking every candidate the same set of questions in the same order, and grading their answers based on a predefined, objective set of criteria can help to reduce the impact of unconscious bias.

This shifts the focus onto what the interview is saying, rather than how the interviewer perceives them.

c) Having a diverse interviewing panel

Ensuring a diverse hiring panel can generally lead to fairer and less biased interviews.

d) Recording interviews

Making interviews accessible for others in the company to view can lessen the impact of unconscious bias. As Euan Cameron, CEO of video interview tech company Willo explains: "Interviewers are less likely to make biased decisions if they know others have access to the same data as they do."

Fostering a **Supportive Environment**

Establishing LGBTQ+ Inclusive Policies and Practices

To promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity, it's important to implement inclusive policies. This means that everyone in the company is aware of the conduct expected of them and creates a culture of respect for every employee.

Non-Discrimination Policy

You can create a policy that explicitly prohibits discrimination against employees or candidates based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Then, communicate the policy with every member of your team.

Equal benefits

If your company offers additional benefits beyond statutory requirements, make sure that they are extended to LGBTQ+ employees wherever applicable. For example, some companies offer fertility/IVF benefits or extended parental leave - if yours does something similar, consider whether it reflects LGBTQ+ employees' experiences too.

Names and pronouns

Being addressed with the wrong name or pronouns can be a very unpleasant experience. It's very important to allow employees to use their preferred name and pronouns on company documentation, including email signatures and ID badges. Some companies encourage their team to include their preferred pronouns (e.g she/her, he/him, they/them) on their email signatures or online profiles.

Dress code

If your company has a dress code policy, you can update it to ensure it is gender-neutral. Get rid of any policies that enforce gendered clothing on any team member. For example, remove policies that specify that women must wear heels or that men must wear ties.

Trans-inclusive policies

To help trans people feel more included at work, it's well worth creating policies to support them. These can include creating gender-neutral restrooms and developing processes for communicating pronouns or new pronouns and names.

Some companies have procedures in place to support trans people who choose to transition, including medical leave.

Make sure that employees are aware that it is never appropriate to ask trans people about personal information that they do not feel comfortable disclosing, just as it would be inappropriate to subject other people to similar lines of questioning. Communicate the concept of workplace boundaries with your team.

Training and education

Help your employees by conducting regular training sessions to raise awareness about LGBTQ+ issues, gender diversity, and unconscious bias. It's crucial that managers in particular know best practices for LGBTQ+ terminology and respectful communication.

Addressing **Complaints**

Creating a safe reporting system

Establish a clear and confidential reporting system designed to handle harassment and discrimination complaints. This should include having multiple people that it's possible to report to. Consider having a designated hotline or email address.

Make sure everyone is aware of the complaints handling policy. Show that you take all complaints seriously and explain the steps you take to investigate concerns.

Responding to discrimination cases

When investigating a discrimination or harassment case, ensure that investigators are sensitive to the specific issues faced by LGBTQ+ individuals.

If the complaint is found to be valid, always take the appropriate disciplinary actions, such as written warnings, compulsory training or even termination, depending on the severity of the complaint.

Zero-tolerance policy

It's advisable that your LGBTQ+ anti-discrimination and harassment policy should be a zero-tolerance one. This means that employees can be confident that if there is an incident of discrimination, then the perpetrator will face consequences. A zero-tolerance policy eliminates blurred lines and can empower LGBTQ+ people in the workplace.

Stonewall

Building inclusive workplaces

An interview with Colin Macfarlane,

Stonewall Scotland

We spoke with Colin Macfarlane, Director of Stonewall Scotland about promoting inclusion at work.

We discussed how businesses can make changes to help nurture their LGBTQ+ employees.

Colin McFarlane | Director, Stonewall Scotland

Stonewall

Eden Scott: Hi Colin. How would you describe the current workplace for LGBTQ+ - is it better or worse than it was ten years ago?

Colin: We've come a long way in the past ten to 15 years. Many more workplaces have realised the importance of creating safe and secure environments for their employees.

We've made some amazing strides in LGBTQ+ equality. Workplace policies that uphold LGBTQ+ people's safety and dignity are much more commonplace. Employers want their staff to be happy and thriving - not just because it means they'll be able to perform better work, but because it's the right thing to do.

It might seem hard to believe now, but up until 2003 it was legal to fire someone for being gay, bi or trans. Now we have better anti-discrimination legal protections in place and more employers understand the importance of treating everyone with respect.

That said, we've seen the tide turning on LGBTQ+ acceptance in recent months. There have been instances of companies being hounded for supporting the Pride movement, for example. Sadly, many of these companies have bowed to the pressure and stopped publicly supporting LGBTQ+ people.

It's so important that companies promote equality during the tough times and not just when it's convenient. Right now, many members of the LGBTQ+ community are feeling worried and scared. It's during times like these that we need companies to double down on their efforts to champion inclusivity in the workplace.

ES: A Stonewall stat shows that more than half of trans people have hidden their identities at work for fear of discrimination, with a further third of trans people being excluded by their colleagues. What can businesses do to support trans people in particular?

C: Businesses can make a huge difference for their trans employees by ensuring that their policies and practices create a safe and inclusive environment. Something as simple as sharing our preferred pronouns can make others feel safer to share theirs.

Making work policies more inclusive can help to clarify what support is available for trans employees. Trans staff may not be aware of how to access certain types of information, like how to request a name change to their email address, or finding out what family leave they're entitled to.

Updating and reviewing policies to be more trans inclusive should be a proactive exercise. Trans staff may not feel confident to ask what benefits are available to them. Having it all written down for everyone to access means employees can find out the info they need without having to out themselves in the process.

Businesses can provide their teams with resources and guidance to help trans colleagues navigate their journey in a supportive way.

ES: In addition to providing better support for trans people, where do UK companies still have room for improvement when it comes to supporting the LGBTQ+ community?

C: Every organisation is on its own unique journey towards LGBTQ+ inclusion. The key is to stick with their commitment to an inclusive workplace culture even when faced with challenges, be that outside pressures or financial restrictions. These should never be excuses to compromise on inclusivity.

In addition, everyone needs an ally – someone who we know will have our back when times are tough. Allyship from non-LGBTQ+ colleagues and leaders can be transformational for businesses. It's powerful when people stand up and say "We need to get this right."

Most of us have a friend, a neighbour, a colleague or a family who's part of the LGBTQ+ community. Being an ally means not leaving it to them to do the heavy lifting, but encouraging others to embrace inclusivity.

ES: What good work are businesses in this area?

C: I've seen some great examples of leaders embodying the ethos and values of inclusivity, setting the tone for the whole company.

In other companies, I've seen some really successful LGBTQ+ networks which have been game-changers for their respective organisations. The groups have worked alongside leadership to support the organisation's journey to inclusivity, meaning the change in culture is being informed by the people who will benefit from it most.

> *"Inclusive changes in our workplaces can shape hearts and minds and have a ripple effect on society as a whole. It's not just the profitable thing to do; it's the proper thing to do."*
>
> **Colin MacFarlane**
> Director of Stonewall Scotland

ES: How does Stonewall work with businesses, and how can businesses support the work that Stonewall does?

C: Stonewall works with organisations in the public, private and third sectors. Our **Diversity Champions Programme** helps companies to create a workplace culture that nurtures LGBTQ+ employees.

When businesses join our program, they get assigned a Client Account Manager who guides them throughout their journey. We provide resources, action planning support, policy assistance and networking opportunities. We also participate in speaking engagements with teams and stakeholders.

In the 15 years since it started, we've seen substantial growth in the number of participants on our Diversity Champions Programme, which helps companies to create a workplace culture that nurtures LGBTQ+ employes.

When I joined Stonewall 12 years ago, we had somewhere in the region of 80 Diversity Champions. Now, we have around 800.

We also run a whole host of **inclusion workshops**, including introductory level ones like "First steps to LGBTQ+ inclusion" and "Introduction to allyship".

We want to thank Colin for sharing his insight with us.

To learn more about how to support or work with Stonewall Scotland visit **www.stonewallscotland.org.uk**
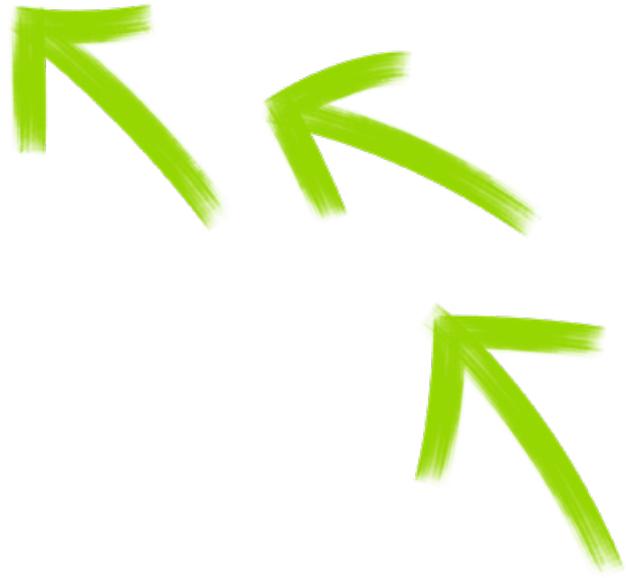
The ABCs of LGBTQ+ terminology

Here's a quick guide to commonly-used LGBTQ+ terminology that you might find helpful. It's worth refreshing your knowledge of these terms by checking through the list from time to time.

Language is ever-evolving, so it's possible that some of the terms below will change - it's worth checking out organisations like **Equality Network** and **Stonewall** for the most up-to-date terminology.

LGBTQ+
An acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning) and other forms of sexual orientation and gender identity, including intersex, asexual and pansexual. Other similar acronyms are frequently used, including LGBT, LGBT+ and LGBTQIA.

Sex vs Gender
The terms 'sex' and 'gender' are often confused - here's what they mean:

- **Sex:** The categorisation of male or female, based on biological markers such as genitalia and chromosomes, that is assigned at birth.

- **Gender:** Characteristics associated with women, men, girls and boys (that are often considered to be socially constructed).

Terms related to gender

- **Gender identity:** The gender with which a person identifies, regardless of their assigned sex at birth.

- **Gender expression:** How a person communicates their gender to others. For example, clothing, makeup, hairstyles, behaviours, etc.

- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity corresponds to their assigned sex at birth.

- **Non-binary:** A person whose gender identity is something other than woman/girl or man/boy.

- **Transgender:** A person whose gender identity differs to their assigned sex at birth.

Terms related to sexual orientation

- **Sexual orientation:** A person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to others.

- **Asexual:** A person who doesn't feel sexual attraction to a person of any gender.

- **Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to both men and women.

- **Gay (Homosexual):** A person who is attracted to people of the same sex or gender. This term often refers to men who are attracted to other men, but can also refer to women who are attracted to other women.

- **Lesbian:** A woman who is attracted to other women.

- **Pansexual:** A person whose attraction to others is not linked to their sex or gender.

- **Straight (Heterosexual):** A person who is attracted to a person of the opposite sex or gender

- **Queer:** A term that some people in the LGBTQ+ community use to refer to any member of that community. Note: The word 'queer' to describe people in the LGBTQ+ community originated as a derogatory term. It was reclaimed by some in the LGBTQ+ community, who now consider it to be a positive or empowering term. However, some people still consider the term 'queer' offensive because of its previous usage.

What if I'm not sure which term to use?

If you're not sure which term is appropriate to use, you can access helpful online resources from organisations like **Equality Network** and **Stonewall**.

Importantly, don't assume that it's appropriate to approach LGBTQ+ colleagues or acquaintances with questions about inclusive terminology.

Of course, if you have a close friendship with an LGBTQ+ person, you can judge for yourself whether it's appropriate to ask for guidance.

We are all people

Regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identity, we are all people.

We all want to be respected, supported and included at work.

Let's continue to make sure we do our best to treat our colleagues as we ourselves would like to be treated.

Sources

- **1.** Stonewall, "LGBT in Britain - Work Report 2020"
- **2.** TUC, "Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual workers' experiences of discrimination in the workplace"
- **3.** MindOut, "LGBTQ Mental Health Statistics"
- **4.** Human Rights Campaign Foundation, "The Cost of the Closet and the Rewards of Inclusion"
- **5.** Forbes, "How Investing In Diversity Increases Profitability"

Hiring with Eden Scott

At Eden Scott, we have access to a rich pool of skilled candidates, ready to work with you when you have a vacancy to fill.

The team at Eden Scott can help by:

- Providing an accurate assessment of the salary landscape
- Promoting your vacancies to our extensive network
- Screening candidates before providing a talented shortlist
- Building relationships with suitable candidates
- Eliminating time-wasting or unsuitable candidates
- Conducting or supporting job interviews
- Negotiating offers and responding to counter-offers

For specialist recruitment support, get in touch.

Contact us to get started.

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