

Gender  
Affirmation at  
La Trobe: A Guide  
for Staff and  
Students



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# Introduction: Gender Affirmation

The La Trobe University [Strategic Plan](#) for the period 2018 to 2022 sets out the ways in which we will modernise our activity while remaining true to our social inclusion ethos. People and culture are an integral part of our mission, and we are leading the way with a number of initiatives for promoting a safe, inclusive and equitable culture including the [2018-2022 Culture Strategy](#) to collectively bring to life La Trobe's cultural qualities - **accountable, connected, innovative and care** - the [La Trobe Equity and Inclusion snapshot](#) and the **2021-2025 Gender Equality Action Plan** to ensure gender equity and inclusivity for marginalised groups.

We celebrate and support sexual and gender diversity across our University. Staff and students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or gender non-binary (LGBTIQA+) are active and integral members of the La Trobe community and we aim to provide support and services that enable them to bring their full-selves to work and study every day.

Not all people are comfortable with the gender that was assigned to them at birth. Some gender diverse people may choose to take steps to socially and/or physically feel more aligned with their gender. This is referred to as gender affirmation. For these people, having their gender identity recognised at work or whilst studying at university is an integral part of living as their affirmed gender.

Affirming one's gender is a unique journey for each person. It may include social and/or medical affirmation. 'Social affirmation' may include coming out/inviting in, changing outward appearance, changing clothing and mannerisms, using chosen names and pronouns. 'Medical affirmation', aligns an individual's body with their gender identity, and this may involve surgery and/or hormone replacement therapy.

Each person's gender affirmation will be different, and it is important that the person who is affirming their gender guides and informs the process.

This Guide is designed to be flexible in recognition of the individual nature of each person's gender affirmation. The staff or student member affirming their gender, their manager and their colleagues all play important roles in the person's gender affirmation process. This Guide provides information specific to each of these important groups and the role they play in supporting someone's gender affirmation process.



# Rights and Responsibilities

At La Trobe, everyone within our community has the right to have their gender identity respected and acknowledged, without fear of negative consequences. As such there are rights and responsibilities which must be upheld by all La Trobe community members with regard to gender diverse and transgender students and staff. These include:

## **Non-discrimination**

The University does not condone intentional or unintentional discrimination or harassment between members of the La Trobe community, including between staff, between staff and students, or between students.

## **Right to Privacy**

Transgender and gender diverse individuals have the right to be who they are without unnecessary disclosure of medical or personal information. First and foremost, an individual's right to privacy must be respected. Information about an individual is confidential.

## **Leave and Time Off**

The gender affirmation process may require an individual to take time off from work and/or study. Leave may be requested for many reasons, which may include medical and non-medical reasons and should be dealt with in the same fashion as any employee requiring time off for health care. Students who are taking steps to affirm their gender are entitled to apply to defer their initial enrolment or take a leave of absence from their studies. The manager and/or course coordinator should assist the individual in understanding their benefits.

## **Appearance and toilets/changerooms**

Transgender and gender diverse individuals are permitted to dress consistently with their gender identity and use the toilet that matches their gender. La Trobe also has 84 gender neutral or shared toilets across all [campuses](#).



# Individuals affirming their gender

## Advanced Preparation

To ensure the gender affirmation process is as smooth as possible, you are encouraged to contact your manager and/or course coordinator as soon as you feel comfortable so that the necessary support can be provided. It is highly recommended that, in consultation with your manager and/or course coordinator, a confidential gender affirmation plan be developed. In general a plan may include communication processes to inform colleagues/peers, a timeline of the gender affirmation process, how to manage inappropriate behaviour.

A template of the La Trobe Gender Affirmation Action Checklist can be accessed by a staff member supporting you [here](#).

Many of your colleagues/peers may have little or no awareness in LGBTIQ+ matters. When developing your plan, consider how involved you would like to be in the education process and what you are willing to share. The, Culture, Diversity and Inclusion team (staff) and the Student Support Team are able to assist you and your manager/course coordinator with resources or training if needed.

## Support

It is good to find a support person or ally who can help you through the affirmation process. This could be a colleague/peer who you have a close relationship with, or an external person such as a partner, friend or family member. If you do not have someone in mind, the Culture Inclusion and Diversity and/or Student Support teams can help you select the right person.

## Identification Change

[Students](#) can change their *title* (including to Mx) and *preferred* name in their online enrolment details at any time without the need for any documentation. Changes to La Trobe student records can be made by completing the Amendment to Personal Details form [here](#). This change *does* require a supporting document, for instance a statement from a medical practitioner. While every effort will be made to ensure all internal records are amended to reflect your preferred name and your gender, some external records, for instance Centrelink records are outside of the University's remit.

Staff can request to change their *preferred* name and *title* in the University's records at any time by completing a Change in Personal Details form on [Ask HR](#). Amendment to staff records does NOT require a change of sex certificate with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriage. A certificate from a medical practitioner is all that is required.\* While every effort will be made to ensure all internal records are amended to reflect your preferred name and your gender, some external records, for instance ATO and Superannuation records are outside of the University's remit.

\*Because of the different status of employees they require a certificate from a medical practitioner.

\*\*More information about identification change can be found in the [Action Checklist](#)

# Information for managers/course coordinators

## Communication and Support

Everyone within our community has the right to bring their whole selves to study and/or work, this includes having their gender identity respected and acknowledged; without fear of negative consequences. If you as a manager or course coordinator are unfamiliar with transgender or gender non conformity, it is essential that you seek support, guidance and training from La Trobe's [LGBTIQA+ Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion](#) team. [Trans Gender Victoria](#) and [Zoe Belle](#) are two external organisations that can also provide educational resources and training. As a manager or course coordinator your support is critical for individuals who inform La Trobe of their intention to affirm their gender or who are in the process of doing this. The most effective way to establish a welcoming, supportive and safe atmosphere is to lead by example.

## Confidentiality

Transgender and gender diverse individuals have the right to be who they are without unnecessary disclosure of medical or personal information. First and foremost, an individuals' right to privacy should be respected. Information should only be disclosed to those who need to know, are involved in the process, or have the consent of the individual. Individuals are not required to disclose medical information to the University.

## Case manager

We recommend that you have a formal case manager in charge of managing a gender affirmation. This person will be the primary contact for the affirming individual, and give colleagues/peers someone to talk to on a confidential basis, if any issues arise. The case manager should be chosen by the person affirming their gender and be from within the organisation, for instance a colleague/peer or someone from HR or Health Wellbeing and Inclusion.

## Support person

Ask the individual if they would like someone to be a support person or ally during the process (in addition to the case manager). This could be a colleague/peer that they have a close relationship with, or an external person such as a partner, friend or family member.

## Identification change

The gender affirming individual will need to change all their records to their new identity. Avoid unreasonable delays as this may cause unnecessary distress. Transitioning individuals do NOT need to register a change of sex with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages before you allow a change to their employment/student records. Because of the different status of employees, they DO require a certificate from a medical practitioner. More information about identification change can be found in the La Trobe Transition Plan [here](#).

# Information for managers/course coordinators: initial conversation

Individuals going through a gender affirmation process are encouraged to confidentially contact their manager and/or course coordinator so that the necessary support and guidance can be provided for a successful transition at La Trobe . Below are some key points for your consideration:

- LGBTIQ community members are protected under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) the Equal Opportunity Act (Vic) and La Trobe policies.
- La Trobe values diversity and recognises that being transgender or gender non-binary has nothing to do with an individuals' ability to undertake their studies or perform their job.
- The individual will direct the gender affirmation plan.
- Managers and/or course coordinators will support the gender affirmation plan.
- Confidentially will be upheld at all times, this includes not prematurely disclosing the individual's gender affirmation.
- Respectfully ask the individual if they expect to change their name. If so, ask what name and pronouns the individual will use and when others should begin using them.
- La Trobe recognises that trans and gender diverse staff can use any facilities (toilets/changerooms) that they feel comfortable with. Managers/course coordinators will support staff in their choice of facilities.

## **Avoid questions about:**

- The person's anatomy or biological gender.
- Whether the person has or intends to have surgery.
- Whether the person is on hormone treatment.
- The person's sexuality (sexuality is not relevant to gender identity).

# Terminology

We understand that terminology is important when talking about gender identity and we aim to be as inclusive as possible. For consistency we use the definitions set out by the Australian Human Rights Commission. These definitions were published after consulting with community groups for inclusion in the 2013 amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act. In reviewing these definitions it is most important to understand that there is a difference between sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. An individual's biology does not determine their gender.

## SEX

Sex refers to a person's biological status. It is typically assigned at birth based on a person's external genitalia. However, there are a number of markers of sex, including hormones, gonads, and chromosomes.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Means who a person is sexually and/or romantically attracted to.

*Some terms to describe sexual orientation include gay, lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, straight, heterosexual.*

## GENDER IDENTITY/GENDER EXPRESSION

The term gender identity is used throughout this resource to describe a person's self-identification of their gender. Gender identity may or may not correspond with a person's sex as assigned at birth. Additionally, each person's expression of gender identity is unique and may or may not conform to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. Gender expression is the way in which a person communicates their gender identity to other through behaviour, clothing, appearance, voice, and other forms of presentation.

*Some terms used to describe a person's gender identity include trans, transgender, gender diverse and gender non-binary.*

## TRANSGENDER

The term transgender is used throughout this resource to describe people whose gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-binary genders also fit under this umbrella term, as well as under the term gender diverse. Not all trans people choose to undergo medical 'transition'.

## LGBTIQA+

It is common to use the acronym LGBTIQA+ when referring to inclusion initiatives for lesbian (L), gay (Gay), bisexual (B), transgender (T) and intersex (I) Asexual (A). The Q for 'Queer' is also usually included as many people prefer to identify under an umbrella term as opposed to specific or more clear directed 'labels' which may not apply'.

# Terminology

## **AFFIRMING GENDER**

Refers to the process of changing one's existing gender expression to reflect one's gender. It is important to note that there is no single or correct way to be trans. The steps that an individual takes to affirm their gender are personal and may change over time. It usually includes a change of name, chosen style of address and pronouns, as well as adopting the dress and style of presentation of a person's innate gender. It may also involve gender reassignment surgery and/or hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Not all who take steps to affirm their gender undergo medically assisted gender reassignment (Pride in Diversity, 2015)

## **GENDER NON-BINARY/GENDER FLUID**

Non-binary gender identities are identities that cannot be described with reference to categories such as masculine/feminine. For example, people who are gender fluid, occupy more than one gender category, do not occupy a gender category, or occupy another type of gender category beyond the binary may (though will not necessarily) identify themselves as non-binary

## **CISGENDER**

Means that a person's gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned to birth. For example, a person understand herself to be female, expresses herself as female, and is also biologically female.

## **HETEROSEXISM**

Discrimination or prejudice against homosexuals on the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation

## **TRANSPHOBIA**

Fear and discrimination against trans people and people thought to be transgender, regardless of their actual gender identity.

## **INTERSEX**

Being intersex is about biological variations, not about a person's gender identity. An intersex person may have the biological attributes of both sexes, or lack some of the biological attributes considered necessary to be defined as one or other sex. Intersex people typically also have a gender identity and sexual orientation. A previous term used to describe an intersex person as 'hermaphrodite'. This is an offensive term to many intersex people. Please do not use this term.

*\*This list is not exhaustive, and some people may prefer to use other terms to refer to their gender and sexuality. The above terms, while they capture more diversity than typical understandings of gender and sexuality, do not represent the full range of possibilities that exist when it comes to talking about the individual experiences that people have of gender, sex, and sexuality.*

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Q

What toilets should the individual going through the gender affirmation process use?

## A

Individuals have the legal right to use the bathroom they feel the most comfortable with. It is not appropriate to ask them to use the accessible toilet. If another employee is uncomfortable with this legal right encourage them to raise concerns privately with the case manager, so that the transitioning individual is not placed in an uncomfortable or harmful position.

## Q

Do you have to have surgery to change genders?

## A

Gender affirmation is different for every person. It may involve 'social transitioning', such as changing outward appearance, clothing, mannerisms, and name. It may also involve a 'medical transition', to align an individual's body with their gender identity, and this may involve gender reassignment surgery and/or hormone replacement therapy. Either way you should never ask if a trans person has had surgery or not, and they are not obliged to reveal medical information to the University.

## Q

A colleague/peer keeps misgendering me – what should I do?

## A

Any consistent and intentional misgendering could be unlawful discrimination. If you don't feel comfortable addressing the behaviour yourself, tell your manager case manager or contact HR.

# Case Study

One day, your employee Ben walks into your office and tells you he is making some important life changes and wants to be assured that your workplace will be inclusive and safe for him. Ben tells you he's been working with a therapist, and has been diagnosed with gender dysphoria. He informs you that he intends to affirm his gender, will be using the name Emily from now on, and would like your support.

## What NOT to do

Panic! This is good news for your organisation. The odds are statistically high that you're about to have a drastically happier, more productive employee. Getting the medical treatment she wants, along with social acceptance, means your employee will be able to express herself more genuinely. Imagine having to hide an aspect of yourself your whole life, playing a role that doesn't feel right, never being able to use vocal inflections or language that felt natural to you. It would be exhausting, right? Now that Emily won't have to do that, you can expect more genuine communication. Do not ask Emily about any medical treatments she may be considering. As with any employee, demanding access to private information with questions about their genitals and other medical matters, including physical changes like breast augmentation or facial hair growth, is invasive and could violate your company's code of conduct, as well as legal guidelines on harassment. Refrain from referring to Emily by her old name or using male pronouns, and don't ask Emily to educate you on transgender issues, including how her relationship with her family may or may not change. As her manager, it is your responsibility to learn the relevant issues.



## What TO do

It is your job to advocate for Emily, to inform other team members, and to make sure she is treated in a respectful and professional way. Understand that without effort on your part, Emily may be treated in a way that will cause her intense distress. From the outset, make it clear that you will proactively work with her to provide support.

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Ask Emily what pronouns she uses and use them going forward — acknowledge that team members may make innocent mistakes at first, and gently remind them by setting an example. If other team members repeatedly use the incorrect pronouns or Emily's former name, pull them aside to have a conversation in which you clearly state that disrespect to Emily will not be tolerated. Update Emily's staff records, email address, and business cards as soon as possible to reflect and reinforce the change.

Some transgender people may seek medical support to better have their bodies reflect their gender identity. Emily may or may not elect to undergo medical or surgical procedures. Should she decide to do so, there should be mechanisms in place to support and accommodate her. Work with her as you would with any employee with any issue requiring time off for health care.

# Additional Resources

## La Trobe

- La Trobe University Transgender in the Workplace Policy
- Gender Diversity at La Trobe Factsheet
- Gender Inclusive Language at La Trobe Factsheet
- Inclusive Data Factsheet

## External

### [Trans Gender Victoria](#)

TGV educates organisations and workplaces on how to provide better services for TGD people and seeks ways to provide direct services to the TGD community, whether in partnership with others or independently.

### [Zoe Belle](#)

Empowering Trans and Gender Diverse Communities

### [GLVH](#)

GLVH, formerly known as Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria, is a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) health and wellbeing policy and resource unit. GLVH is funded by the Victorian Government and sits within the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society (ARCHSHS), La Trobe University

### [Pride in Diversity](#)

Pride in Diversity is the national not-for-profit employer support program for LGBTI workplace inclusion specialising in HR, organisational change and workplace diversity

### [Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission](#)

It is unlawful to try and change or suppress someone's sexual orientation or gender identity



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