

# POLICY GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF PRONOUNS

Pronouns are words we use in everyday language to refer to ourselves or others. They can be an important way to express your gender identity. 'I', 'me', 'she/her', 'he/him' and 'they/them' are some examples of pronouns.

It can be good equality practice to ask for pronouns and this stops any potential embarrassment. People determine their own pronouns – you should never assume and you should always use their preferred pronouns. Examples are: 'she/her' – 'he/him' – 'they/them'.

Although you may feel it personally unnecessary to do so, and it may even make you feel a little uncomfortable at first, sharing your pronouns helps raise awareness and acceptance of different gender identities, including non-binary identities. At the very least, it creates an open and inclusive environment.

As with anything new, practice makes perfect. It will take time for this to become a habitual part of your communications.

Some people will add their preferred pronouns to their email signature, or to their Zoom account. Again, this is good practice as it allows others to prepare themselves to address someone in their preferred manner. It is standard practice on NASUWT training courses for members to be invited to do this, but it is important to state that this is a personal choice. No one should be forced to do so.

Indicating your own pronouns is ultimately a personal choice. However, if someone has indicated their pronouns to you, make sure you use them correctly.

As previously stated, pronouns are words we use in everyday language to refer to ourselves or others.

'They' has been used as a singular pronoun since 1375! We use a singular 'they', 'them' or 'their' often. For example, if you find a jacket that was left behind in the room, you may ask:  
"Did someone leave their jacket here?"

Some trans and gender non-conforming people may use 'they', 'them' and 'their' as personal pronouns. 'They' is considered a gender-neutral pronoun, compared to pronouns like 'he/him' or 'she/her', which are generally perceived as gendered terms.

**Example:** *"Sarah works in our pastoral team. They delivered an informative presentation today about their most recent project."*

Some people may wish to use more than one set of pronouns to refer to themselves. For example, a gender non-conforming person may feel equally comfortable with 'they/them', 'he/him' or 'she/her' pronouns. Other trans and gender non-conforming people may not be out; therefore, they may use different pronouns so they are comfortable in different situations.

If someone uses more than one set of pronouns, you can ask them what they would prefer you to use. They may prefer you use all of them interchangeably, or keep to one set. Remember that this can be contextual; for example, because someone may use different pronouns at work or at home.

**Example:** *“Reese has exceeded their targets this year. She plans to apply for a promotion soon.”*

- For some people, the correct way to refer to them is by using their name only. If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, you can also refer to them by name instead.

**Example:** *“Jay is taking the minutes for Jay's next meeting.”*

**Correct use of pronouns is key to helping all staff feel included at work. It can reassure trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming colleagues that they are welcome and included in NASUWT.**

Here are some tips you can share:

- If you are not sure what someone's pronouns are, ask them or listen to what pronouns they use. You can also use gender-neutral pronouns to refer to someone you have not had contact with yet, or simply refer to them by their name.
- Use someone's correct pronouns or form of address once you are aware of them. It may feel simpler to refer to everyone with gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. 'they'/'them'), but you could accidentally misgender someone by doing so.
- If you make a mistake when referring to someone, apologise, correct yourself and move on. Avoid apologising too much, as this can draw further attention to your mistake and make the other person uncomfortable. Try practising referring to them by their correct pronouns. Try this beyond your usual workspace, perhaps by yourself or with others. For example: “This is my colleague Rhiannon, they booked the meeting room earlier.”

**Use of the terms 'he'/'she', or 's/he' is not inclusive, in that they exclude those who do not identify using those pronouns. NASUWT has worked hard to make its documentation, guidance and training courses gender-neutral.**

**Repeatedly and deliberately using an incorrect pronoun, however, can create a hostile environment for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming colleagues. Where there is a clear and deliberate breach of this guidance/policy within an NASUWT context or space, this may constitute a breach of the Union's Code of Conduct that could lead to disciplinary action.**

**NASUWT Representatives and negotiators should be mindful of this policy guidance when looking at policies and procedures in their schools, colleges, trusts and local authorities.**