

Trans and Non-Binary (TNB) staff network statement for friends and allies:

Some of you have recently asked us how you could better support TNB staff members and students at Sussex. We know that many are already showing support in various ways, but also that it can at times be difficult to know what we can do. That's why we'd like to share with you some of the things that might affect us and, most importantly, some simple things you can do in support:

1. Understanding our situation and the things that affect us

Before we get into the difficult things, we want to make clear that: Yes, being trans can come with many struggles, but even with these struggles most of us would say that we are now much happier than before understanding our gender identity, coming out, or transitioning.

The background noise

For most of us there will be an ongoing day to day strain of navigating systems which are not inclusive for trans people. Examples are: Struggling to access transition-related health care, complicated procedures for changing our names and gender markers on legal documents, or dealing with family issues. Currently, TNB people are also disproportionately affected by the ongoing pandemic and lack of access to community support which we so often rely on.

Experiencing transphobia

Additional to this, there are some important ways in which transphobia can affect us specifically in the spaces where we work and study:

- **Hypervigilance:** We have become used to expecting and anticipating transphobic comments and discourses in most spaces we need to access (including seminars, work meetings, social activities, conferences, etc.).
- **Exhaustion:** Hypervigilance, along with the dehumanising experience of constantly being framed as an 'issue of debate' costs a lot of energy. This exhaustion can manifest emotionally, mentally, and physically and impact our ability to work and study.
- **Lack of access to appropriate support:** Often mental health as well as physical health services & professionals do not have experience in working with TNB people. Fear of experiencing transphobia creates another barrier to accessing support, especially for TNB people of multiply-marginalised identities.
- **Censorship:** In the current hostile environment we increasingly experience fear of speaking out against transphobia due to structural inequalities and continuous trans hostile media campaigns. This affects our ability to write about TNB experiences and gender-related topics in research or student essays.

2. What you can do to show support

Show solidarity

- Share messages of solidarity: These can be public or private and can include creative forms (such as a trans flag sticker on your office door, etc.)
- Show understanding & acknowledgement: Communicate that you are aware of how transphobia might affect TNB people at Sussex in their work and studies.

Offer support

- Check-in on TNB colleagues and students and ask if there is any support we need.
- Offer tangible ways of support, such as:
 - more time / extensions for assignments for TNB students
 - support in & after meetings where issues come up
- Be prepared to stand up to transphobia:
 - When planning events, meetings, seminars, etc. have a conversation with people involved about how you will deal with transphobic comments if these come up.
 - Be aware of transphobic “dog-whistles” which affect TNB people particularly and try to call these out where possible.
 - If you’d like to gain a better understanding of how transphobia might look like, please check out: <https://www.transactual.org.uk/transphobia>

3. Know what TNB people would really rather not have to deal with

- People using our deadnames (any previous names that we do not use anymore)
- Questions about surgery or other medical interventions
- Questions about appearance (related to/ intended to ‘get clues’ about someone’s gender), like “oh you’ve had your hair cut/ are/n’t wearing make-up, does this mean...”
- Comments which frame being TNB as a trend and reinforce the idea that only young people are TNB.
- Requests to “debate”: There is an important difference between discussing the issues we face and how we can best address these - something most TNB people do, often with each other - and discussing ‘trans issues’ in a way that frames us as the ‘issue’ to be debated: Discussions which call into question our identity, our existence, and our rights to the things that are necessary for us to be able to live in this world as ourselves. The insistence on having such debates, as well as on TNB people listening to or participating in these, is a technique of elimination and a core part of creating a hostile environment for TNB people.
 - If you’d like to learn more about this, we recommend this article by Sara Ahmed: [An Affinity of Hammers](#)

4. General advice for allies - how can you create spaces where TNB people feel welcome and supported?

Always assume there are TNB people in the room

- In general, it is always best to try to be sensitive to the fact that there could be TNB people in the room. This means that one should *always* try to speak and act as if there are TNB people watching and listening.
- Offer your pronouns by default to normalise asking about them

Use the correct names and pronouns that people share with you:

- If you use the wrong pronouns for someone and they or someone else corrects you don't make a big deal of it, just apologise and continue to make an effort to use the right pronouns for them and others.
- When using a different language which has different forms of marking gender, ask TNB people which option would make them feel most comfortable. This includes the option to avoid using pronouns if there are none that fit.

5. Helpful Resources

- Article: Sara Ahmed 'An Affinity of Hammers' (2016: 31)
- Book: Shon Faye 'The Transgender Issue'
- Book: Lola Olufemi 'Feminism, Interrupted'
- Book: Alison Phipps 'Me Not You'

[Government Equalities Office - Trans Guidance](#)

[Facts about Trans Rights and Trans Lives - Transactual](#)

[The truth about Trans \(stonewall.org.uk\)](#)

[Survivor's Network for Trans and Non-Binary Survivors of Sexual Violence](#)