



EQUALITY IN TEACHING CHECKLIST





EQUALITY IN TEACHING

Information and checklist for teaching staff on integrating the equality dimension in teaching

Integrating the equality dimension means that institutions will incorporate equality into their day-to-day operations. It is vital to ensure equality in teaching and research, these being the main components of University of Iceland operations. This booklet describes the best ways to integrate the equality dimension in teaching.

The strategy outlined in the UI Equality Policy takes into account the fact that teaching staff, students and other staff at UI are a diverse group of people. Different groups have unequal positions in society and are afforded different levels of respect; various innate, social and cultural factors can lead to discrimination. Discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, origin, skin colour, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, health, religion, views, residence status, financial means or culture is forbidden at the University of Iceland. It is important to keep in mind the intersectionality of discrimination, i.e. the way in which people's status or the discrimination they face stems from the combined influences of different variables or social factors.

The UI Equal Rights Policy is based on the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men no. 10/2008, which dictates that students at all levels of the education system shall receive instruction on equality issues in which emphasis shall be placed, amongst other things, on preparing both sexes to play an equal role in society, including work and family life (Article 23).

Discrimination is often inadvertent and unconscious and this checklist was developed with the aim of raising consciousness among UI staff of equality in the classroom.

The UI equality officer has compiled this checklist, in partnership with the UI Centre for Teaching and Learning. The UI Equal Rights Committee and the Council for Disability Rights are also responsible for publication of the checklist. This checklist is a living document which we will continue to develop. Comments should be sent to jafnretti@hi.is.



Where can I get advice?

Take part in discussions on the integration of the equality dimension

There are regular discussions and informative meetings on integration of the equality dimension where staff can share their experiences, ask questions and get practical information. Meetings are publicised on the UI Centre for Teaching and Learning website (kemst.hi.is).

Seek advice from colleagues

It can be helpful to seek advice from colleagues if you run into problems or have any questions. Equality is a shared project for the whole University community. It is important to share experiences related to equality and integration.

Seek advice from experts at the University

The University of Iceland is fortunate enough to have many members of staff who are experts in the field of equality. You can contact the equality officer or student counsellors responsible for student disability services. There are also a lot of academics working in fields related to equality, for example gender studies, disability studies, multicultural studies and queer theory. All schools at the University have an equal rights committee that can provide guidance.

More information on equal rights at the University of Iceland as well as the University Equal Rights Policy is available at equality.hi.is. You can email the equality officer at jafnretti@hi.is. Information on the UI Student Counselling and Career Centre can be found at nshi.hi.is or by emailing radgjof@hi.is.

Pornification and gender-based violence

Are there defined response procedures at the University?

Yes. The rules of procedure on the response to gender-related and sexual harassment and other sexual violence (see the glossary at the end of this booklet for definitions) are accessible on equality.hi.is, along with related material. It is important that we are all aware of how to respond to such incidents. A dedicated Professional Council at the University receives and processes complaints and reports of such offences. All further information can be found on equality.hi.is, including information on who to contact.

What should I do if I become aware of a case of sexual harassment?

If such a case comes up, whether a student complains or a member of teaching staff witnesses sexual harassment, University rules dictate that the aforementioned Professional Council is contacted.

What is pornification and how does it affect people?

Pornification and the atmosphere it creates are closely related to prejudiced discourse. The term pornification is used to describe the phenomenon whereby pornography and references to pornographic imagery, symbols and language are used in our everyday environments. This generally involves the portrayal, reinforcement or participation in the sexual subordination of a certain group. Pornification marginalises and degrades certain groups, women in particular. By understanding what pornified discourse entails, it is possible to react to and prevent such behaviour.



Syllabus and course material

Is it important to release the syllabus well in advance?

It is helpful for students to be able to access the syllabus in good time, for example so that they can estimate the cost of books and organise themselves. Reading lists should be prepared well in advance, particularly when course material has to be made accessible for students who require disability services, but also to give students the opportunity to order books from abroad.

Is it important to include material from a diverse group of authors on the reading list?

It is important that students encounter as many different perspectives as possible in their subject. The influence and visibility of authors by gender differs according to subject. Teaching staff can have an impact on whether students are introduced to texts by women and men, and thereby different perspectives. It is also a good idea to consider other variables, for example sexual orientation, disability and authors' origins, since there are many factors that could affect an author's perspective and approach to a topic. The same considerations apply to visiting scholars – it is a good idea to keep the diversity of visiting scholars in mind for the courses you are responsible for.

Is it useful to include discourse on equality in the syllabus?

Yes. In many subjects, there is a lot of material to discuss, but in others it may be more of a challenge to find books and articles looking at a topic through gender perspective or exploring the ways in which stereotypes of various groups have affected the status of knowledge in the subject. For example, it would be possible to explore the stereotypes of people that sometimes arise in certain fields based on disability, origin, skin colour, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, health, religion, views, residence status, financial means or culture.

Icelandic law stipulates that students at all levels of education shall receive instruction on gender equality issues. Teaching staff are in a key position to ensure that students complete their studies with a broad perspective on their subject. This can be achieved by, for example, encouraging students to ask critical questions about culture, sex, gender, origin, skin colour, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, health, religion, views, residence status or financial means, as well as intersectional discrimination.

Teaching spaces

Is the teaching space itself important?

It can be interesting to look at the classroom with the equality dimension in mind, for example look at whether certain groups are more visible than others in the pictures on the wall; what advertisements or posters are on display and what messages do they send about men and women, people from different backgrounds and disabled people. Teaching staff can influence the appearance and organisation of a teaching space and discuss portrayal of different genders and the impact of this with students.

Who is responsible for ensuring the classroom is accessible to all students?

Accessibility is one of the most pressing concerns of students who use wheelchairs or have limited mobility, but accessibility issues should be explored with a broad understanding of the word and students requiring disability services must be taken into consideration. Teaching staff and students must make a concerted effort to tackle and prevent accessibility problems and attitude-related impediments.

Students are responsible for contacting the Student Counselling and Career Centre so that they can talk to the relevant faculty office and the course supervisory teacher about finding solutions, for example regarding the classroom. Information on where teaching will take place must be clear and accessible to students. Teaching staff must keep accessibility in mind when organising their teaching, for example consider whether there will be field trips or presentations for which students will need to stand up on stage or get to the whiteboard in the classroom.



Furniture

When it comes to choosing furniture for a classroom, it is worth bearing in mind that the student population is diverse and one solution may not suit everyone. For example, it is important to accommodate pregnant women and students of different sizes in general. Small chairs with attached tables are not suitable for everyone. Having different kinds of furniture in classrooms accommodates diversity.

Consideration must also be given to how the classroom will be used before furnishing it. What group is the room for? What space do students need? Do they maybe need larger tables to do calculations or will tables large enough for a computer or a book be sufficient? Would it perhaps be useful to have furniture that can be moved?



Students

Being aware of and open to diversity and its impact on the student group, teaching and discussions

The student population at the University of Iceland is diverse with regards to disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, origin, nationality, religion, culture and age.

It is important to keep this diversity in mind and avoid making assumptions based on the idea that the student population is homogeneous, or that certain studies are better suited to one group than others. Many teaching staff use humour in a positive way to foster a good atmosphere in the class – respect is as important here as it is in other ways. Teaching staff should stay conscious of the fact that various groups are subjected to humiliation and silencing in the guise of humour. It is a good idea to systematically and positively build on the diversity of the student group in your teaching, such as their difference knowledge and experiences.

What can I do to encourage as many students as possible to participate equally?

It is a good idea to think about the status, participation and engagement of students with gender, disability and other factors in mind. Is student participation in class equal? Do certain groups dominate? Is there a gender gap with regards to participation and engagement? Are some groups over-represented in assistance or support roles? In the case of group work, are groups homogeneous or mixed? Are projects presented more by certain students than others, for example, do disabled students receive less significant responsibilities than other students; are homosexual students asked to speak for all LGBT people; do students of foreign origin take less space and express themselves less than other students? Or are there other discernible differences between groups that you notice? Issues like this could mean there is cause to re-evaluate your teaching methods and create more opportunities for all groups to participate. Your methods and approach should seek to empower students in these situations.

It is a good idea to keep students' different backgrounds and experiences in mind because these factors could affect their understanding of and approach to the material. It is also possible to make use of different student experiences, for example in discussions of the course material. It is clear that the student population at the University of Iceland is a very diverse group. The status of students and issues that affect them are not necessarily visible; it is important not to make generalisations or fall into the trap of subscribing to negative stereotypes about a certain group of people.

Is the sex ratio in a group of students important?

Teaching staff should be aware of the sex ratio in their subject and courses. This information can be used to support discussions and get students thinking about the status of different genders in the subject and talking about the possible reasons for this. Teaching staff can have a huge impact on whether all students are given space and recognised as equals in the classroom, for example in discussions.

Student disability services

Students requiring disability services should contact the Student Counselling and Career Centre before 1 October for the autumn semester and 1 March for the spring semester and enter into a disability services contract on the basis of the Regulation on disability services for study at the University of Iceland (no. 481/2010). It is worth reminding students to inform teaching staff if they require services that affect teachers directly. In these cases, teaching staff may ask to see the contract for confirmation. Further information is available on the Student Counselling and Career Centre website, english.hi.is/student_counselling_and_career_centre.

How can teaching staff help students to balance study and family responsibilities?

Students have differing family responsibilities. There are various ways that teaching staff can make it easier for students to balance studies and family responsibilities, for example by publishing a detailed syllabus with information on the teaching schedule, assignments and exams no later than by the beginning of the semester. It is important for teaching staff to take students with family responsibilities into account and avoid scheduling extra classes outside of standard working hours. It is worth bearing this in mind when it comes to take-home exams outside of standard working and school hours, since students with children could find it more difficult to use this time for exams.



Communication with students and within the student group

Is it helpful to learn the names of as many students as possible?

It is important for students to feel at home in their subject as quickly as possible. For example, all students should feel like they are part of the group. Learning the students' names helps them feel at home and strengthens connections to their subject, teachers and fellow students. It may be useful for teaching staff to have pictures of the students in the learning management system.

Is it important to respect students' choice of name and use the correct pronouns?

Yes, it is important to respect students' wishes regarding their own names and pronouns. Some students may perhaps choose names and pronouns that do not appear to match their gender or what is written on the register. By respecting the wishes of, for example, trans and intersex students, teaching staff can help to reinforce the idea that individuals have full control over their own gender and name. For example, people who identify as non-binary may choose to use gender neutral pronouns. Perhaps the most common pronoun is they/them and in Iceland a common pronoun is hán. The important thing is that teachers respect the wishes of the students.

Avoid labelling and demeaning terms for certain groups

There are a huge number of labels that have been used in a derogatory way about, for example, LGBT people and disabled people. It is important that staff and students are careful to avoid using inappropriate or demeaning words in their interactions. For example, the words 'dear' or 'love' directed at students could be considered loaded terms; and many terms that dominant groups (e.g. heterosexual people) have used to describe marginalised groups (e.g. referring to gay men as 'fags') are considered highly offensive. Common sense will suffice in most cases, but naturally uncertainty will sometimes arise and it is important to remember that people are seldom offended by questions asked in a

respectful manner, for example if a teacher is unsure which pronouns a student chooses to use.

How do I personally interact with students and how well do I succeed in treating them all equally?

Everyone is capable of making mistakes. When it comes to teaching, office hours, emails and other interaction with students, it is a good idea to analyse your own communication with your equality glasses on. Do I treat people differently based on their sex? Do I sometimes fall into the trap of assuming that disabled students are helpless? Do people get uncomfortable, for example in a discussion about romantic relationships, as soon as homosexual people are involved, and are these discussions even unwittingly shut down? Do I make assumptions about progression and understanding when it comes to students of foreign origin? It is useful to analyse our own communication in these ways. It helps to prevent subconscious discrimination.

How can I create a safe space which is free from prejudice and discrimination?

Remember diversity. It is a good idea to ensure that discussions and examples used reflect diversity. This helps students feel acknowledged and secure and makes it less likely that fear of prejudice will prevent, for example, homosexual, trans or disabled students expressing themselves as much as other students.

Respect in online communication

People can be more unkind when communicating online. It is a good idea to set clear standards for communication on online forums, emphasising respect and kindness in accordance with [the University of Iceland Code of Ethics](#) and making everyone aware that hateful discourse and prejudice will not be tolerated. If there is a Facebook page to support teaching, the teacher should be an admin in order to encourage a good standard of communication and ensure that all students have access to the page. Suggested communication guidelines for students can be found below.



Tackle prejudice when it emerges

If and when prejudice emerges, it is important that the teacher reacts by tackling it and letting the students know that it will not be tolerated. It can often be difficult to eradicate prejudice in others, but the position and support of the teacher can make a real difference for the targets of prejudice. If necessary, teaching staff can seek advice on how to respond to prejudice from their school equality committee or equality officer.

Student communication – Proposed guidelines to be included on a course syllabus

It is important to treat others with kindness and respect, in accordance with [the University of Iceland Code of Ethics](#). It is possible to exchange opinions, debate and disagree without communicating in an aggressive or derogatory way.

At the University of Iceland, discrimination and gender-related or sexual harassment will not be tolerated, in accordance with [the University of Iceland Equal Rights Policy](#). It is forbidden to humiliate, mock, threaten or attack people based on their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, origin, skin colour, religion etc. This applies to all communication, both face-to-face and online.

Avoid falling back on stereotypes or putting people into predetermined boxes based on groups you believe they belong to. Ask yourself whether you would treat the person the same if they were not disabled, of a different gender, of a different sexual orientation, a different origin etc. If you are not sure how a certain comment will be received, it could be better to keep it to yourself. Treat each other with understanding and respect – let's work together to create a tradition of healthy debate.



Assessment and learning outcomes

Is there an attainment gap between the sexes in exams and assignments?

It can be helpful and interesting to check whether there is an attainment gap between the sexes in previous exams and assignments, for example whether such a gap is evident in certain kinds of assessment rather than others (for example essay questions or multiple choice questions). If there is a discernible gap, it is important to explore whether there is a reasonable explanation for this. It is also a good idea to think about the structure of course assessment, perhaps using a combination of different assessment methods.

What should I keep in mind when assessing student performance?

There are some indications that sex stereotypes affect the way student performance is assessed, for example women are more likely to be described with different words than those used to describe men. One such example would be women described as diligent and enthusiastic, where men are described as intelligent and determined. People also sometimes tend to value characteristics considered to be masculine over characteristics

considered feminine. It is important to be aware of the extent to which such stereotypes affect the way we think about individual students.

Grades

It is very helpful for students to receive constructive comments alongside their grades. Students are better able to improve their performance if they know what their grade was based on. Clear rubrics for marking assignments and exams also make things easier for teaching staff. It is important that students are provided with clear information on the expectations and requirements made of them and used in assessment. It is also important for students to know the make-up of their final grade. Is it clear, for example, whether grades are from 1–10, or letter grades, or pass/fail?

What fonts and font size should I use?

It is helpful for many students with dyslexia when exams and assignments are printed in size 14 Arial or Calibri font. In a very few cases, a smaller font size may be more suitable. This depends on the individual. However, all students benefit from having online access to all course material.



Providing clear study requirements at the beginning of a course is important

All organisation of studies is positive and helps students to be able to organise themselves in advance. It is important that clear learning outcomes and study requirements are available at the beginning of the course. For example, students should be informed as early as possible if a course will require being outside in a place with limited accessibility (for example mountain climbing). Students should also be informed of how a course will be assessed, for example through take-home exams, conventional exams, assignments, reading diaries etc. It is important that deadlines and exam dates are available at the beginning of the semester (the examination timetable is published at the end of September for the autumn semester and the end of January for the spring semester).

It is a good idea to explicitly state in the course description and at the beginning of the course which languages students can use for assignments and the final examination. Is it possible to sit the final examination in English?

How can I support student competence in the field of equality?

Icelandic law dictates that students at all levels of the education system shall receive instruction on equality issues, since it is important to prepare students to participate in a diverse society based on principles of equality. It is a good idea to think about whether the learning outcomes take this into account and look for ways to ensure that students acquire competence in this area in the course of their studies. It is worth mentioning that teaching staff may ask experts in equality matters to fulfil this role.

Teaching methods

How can I help blind, visually impaired and dyslexic students in my lectures?

Writing on a board is of little or no use to students who are visually impaired or blind, but it is helpful if the teacher reads aloud while writing. Audio material and other course material accessible online is better suited to students with visual impairments or dyslexia. It is a good idea to keep in mind that using diverse teaching methods makes it more likely that the course will meet the needs of as many students as possible, both disabled and non-disabled.

How can I help deaf or hearing impaired students in my lectures?

It is important that the student has access to good interpreting services, meaning that both the teacher and the student should be aware of the work and role of interpreters. Good accessibility for hearing impaired students means that the information/message should be clearly communicated to them. Four strategies in particular are useful here: text/subtitles, amplification, text interpreting and sign language interpreting. It depends on the level of hearing impairment which of these will be most appropriate. Interpreters have access to the course website on Ugla through a special group. If teachers do not upload material to Ugla before class, they are asked to email preparatory material to the interpreter. The classroom must be brightly lit to ensure that the student can easily see the interpreter.

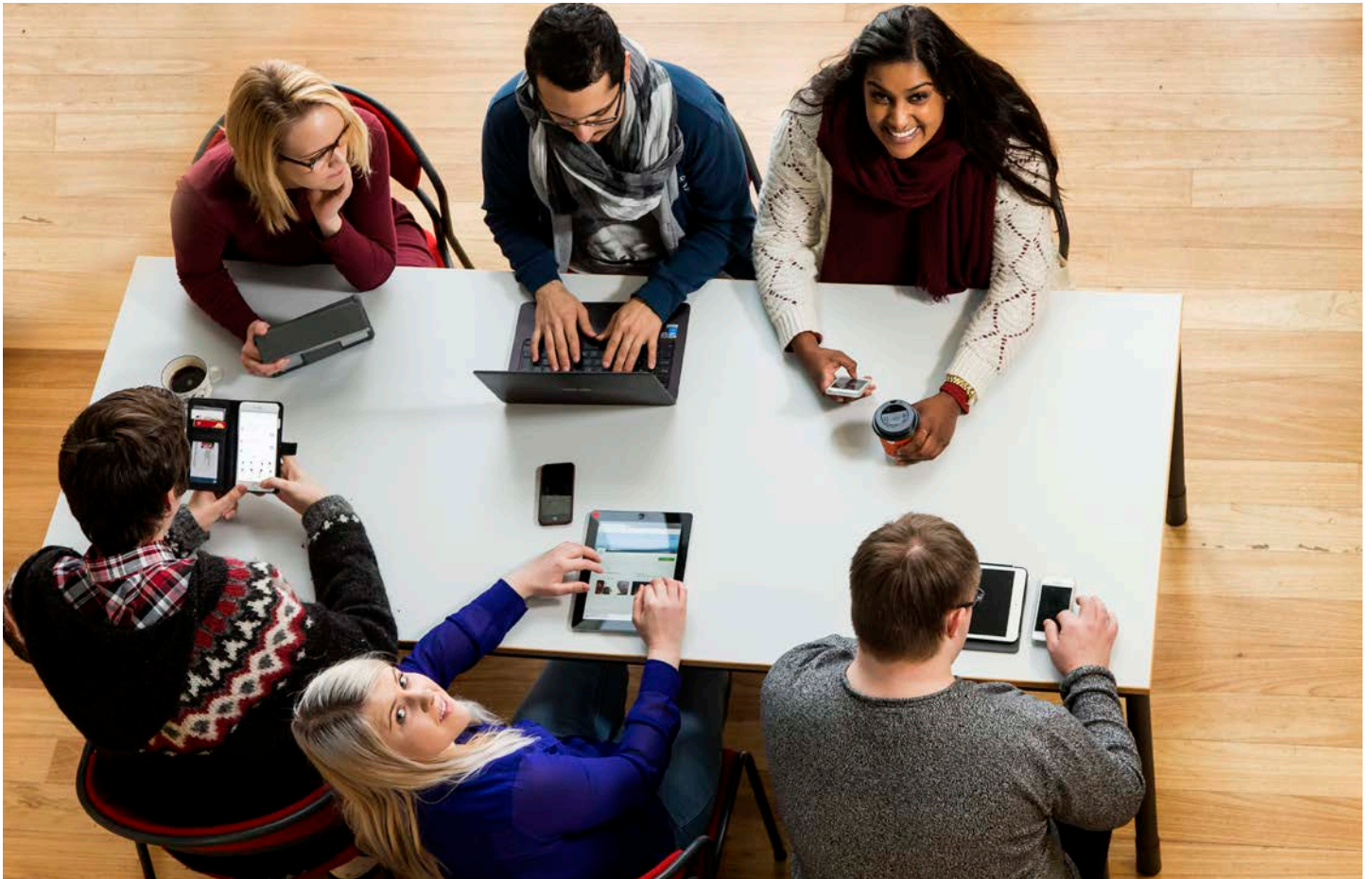
Diverse discussions are important

When teaching staff give examples in teaching, it is a good idea to keep diversity in mind, for example use examples about people of different origins, different ages, women in male-dominated professions and vice versa, gay people, trans people, disabled people etc.

Visual material can be used to reflect diversity

Using visual material in your teaching that shows the diversity of humankind can be very effective. It is important to review your teaching material, especially lecture slides, with this in mind. It is worth remembering that visual material that stays 'inside the box' (for example a white, heterosexual, non-disabled couple, men in male-dominated professions and vice versa) is more likely to reinforce traditional ideas about what is 'normal' rather than challenge them.





Assistant teachers and writing references

Is it important to choose assistant teachers with equality in mind?

It is a good idea to think about equality when choosing assistant teachers and consider whether students have equal opportunities in this area. For example, you could look at the sex ratio of previously hired assistant teachers – is the group homogeneous or diverse? What kind of requirements do we have when we hire assistant teachers? Are 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits valued differently? Does this mean that we are more likely to subconsciously select people of a particular gender for the job? You might consider hiring men, women and non-binary people alternately whilst also ensuring

that other variables do not rule anyone out, such as disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, skin colour, origin, language, background, culture, etc.

What should I keep in mind when writing a reference letter?

When writing a reference letter, it is a good idea to think about equality and ask yourself questions such as: "Would I phrase this in the same way if the student was of a different gender, of a different origin or colour, or non-disabled?" When we are careful to avoid basing our opinion of a student on things like this, we are likely to write fair and consistent references.

List of terminology

Ageism: Prejudice based on the idea that someone has reached a certain age and is therefore different, has different needs, desires or abilities, different expectations or outlooks on life.

Disability/ability: There are many different kinds of disability, but generally the word refers to an impairment that is physical and/or mental. Disabled people often have trouble navigating their environments and prevailing culture seldom takes them and their circumstances into account. Society is generally focused on non-disabled people. The term 'ableism' has been used to describe this phenomenon. This is a parallel concept to sexism and racism. It is used to describe prejudice and/or discrimination against disabled people and situations where the needs of non-disabled people are prioritised.

Gender-based harassment and sexual harassment: Gender-based harassment is often an attempt to force people to comply with traditional gender roles. Procedure at the University dictates that the Professional Council be contacted if such harassment occurs. The term gender-based harassment refers to behaviour that is related to a person's gender, is unwelcome, and has the purpose or effect of violating the target's dignity and creating conditions that are threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive. Harassment may be physical, verbal or symbolic. A single incident may be deemed gender-based harassment. The term sexual harassment refers to any kind of unwelcome sexual behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating the target's dignity, particularly if such behaviour leads to conditions that are threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive. Such behaviour may be verbal, symbolic and/or physical. A single incident may be deemed sexual harassment.

Gender-based violence: Violence committed on the basis of a person's gender which leads to or may lead to physical, sexual, or psychological harm or distress for the target, as well as the threat thereof, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, both in private and public. The Professional Council must always be contacted if there is any suspicion that such an offence has taken place at the University.

Gender identity: The gender that people identify as being, which may be different to their biological sex (for example in the case of trans people).

Gender perspective: Looking at a situation from a gender perspective means to think critically about it from the perspective of gender equality.

Integration: Integrating the equality dimension means that institutions will incorporate ideas about equality into their day-to-day operations.

Intersectionality: The way in which people's status or the discrimination they face stems from the combined influences of different variables or social factors.

Intersex: This term applies to a wide variety of congenital physical characteristics or variations that deviate from our standardised ideas about male and female bodies. Intersex individuals are born with characteristics that are not entirely male or female – that are a combination of male and female or neither male nor female.

Micro aggression: Micro aggressions are commonplace actions, comments or environmental factors that are derogatory or humiliating for people belonging to marginalised groups. Each individual action or comment need not be serious, but when they occur regularly, or daily, it adds to the stress that people experience and exacerbates their marginalisation. Perpetrators of micro aggressions do not necessarily mean to harm or marginalise people – indeed micro aggressions are sometimes intended as a compliment. Perpetrators may therefore be completely unaware of the consequences of their actions and often find it difficult to spot micro aggressions or understand how such behaviour can be harmful.

Non-binary: Non-binary is a term used to describe people who define themselves outside of the binary system of gender (and are therefore also trans). For example, some non-binary people are both male and female, neither male nor female, or do not define their gender at all. Non-binary is therefore an umbrella term that comes under the umbrella term 'trans'.

Origin: This means the place of origin or roots that a person has, for example if a person or their family is originally from another country. Icelanders can have different origins.

Pornification: The term pornification is used to describe the phenomenon whereby pornography and references to pornographic imagery, symbols and language are used in our everyday environments. This generally involves the portrayal, reinforcement or participation in the sexual subordination of a certain group. Pornification marginalises and degrades certain groups, women in particular.

Privilege: Privilege can be defined as some kind of advantage. The privilege of non-disabled people includes not having to define themselves, not having to explain themselves, having good general access to all areas of society and conforming to society's standards.

Sex and gender: Sex refers to physical and biological sex. Gender refers to socially constructed / cultural characteristics, i.e. femininity and masculinity. Gender can be diverse and is not necessarily determined by biological sex.

Sexual orientation: Refers to the people we are sexually attracted to. It can fluctuate and be diverse. Heterosexuality generally dominates and it is important to make sure we do not always assume everyone to be heterosexual.

Trans people – transgender: Trans is an umbrella term referring to people whose gender identity does not align with their birth sex. The trans umbrella covers trans men and trans women, people who have sex reassignment surgery, people who do not have surgery and non-binary people

Definitions supplied by:

Hinsegin frá Ö til A

Intersex Ísland

Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men (no. 10/2008)

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