



Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



Request Number: F-2009-03060

Keyword: Human Resources

Subject: APPROPRIATE / INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

Request and Answer:

Question

Under the Freedom of Information Act, please could you provide copies of documents provided for officers and staff to advise them on their use of language - i.e., lists of words or language that may be deemed "offensive", "inappropriate" and that should be avoided.

Answer

Please see the attached document containing the PSNI's Appropriate Language Guide. For your information this document is currently being reviewed.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this email.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing FOI@psni.pnn.police.uk

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ <http://www.psni.police.uk/>

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.



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Equality & Diversity Unit

Guide to Appropriate Language



Making Northern Ireland Safer



Making Northern Ireland Safer

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Making Northern Ireland Safer

Guide to Appropriate Language

Foreword

The Police Service of Northern Ireland is a professional organisation and it is essential that we take a lead in using language that does not exclude colleagues or members of the community, does not stereotype and always shows a whole hearted commitment to supporting our Equal Opportunities Policy.

By demonstrating our commitment to getting our language and communications right, we hope to reassure officers, staff and local communities of our commitment to fighting crime and protecting all of the people within Northern Ireland.

We are aware that there are varying views in the police service about the importance of language as an equality issue, but we strongly believe that our commitment to diversity will be strengthened and easier to achieve if we carefully examine the language we use and ensure we treat people as individuals, not merely as members of groups.

It is important to remember that the context in which language is used is as relevant as the actual words uttered and we are mindful that context must be taken in account. It is also critical that people do not find themselves so apprehensive about the language they use that we fail to communicate at all.

The information contained in this guide is intended to help to protect staff from making unintentional mistakes in the language they use and to help them interact better with our communities.

It also provides valuable guidance on how staff should respond to inappropriate language, both within and outside the workplace. Getting it right sends an important message about our awareness of equality issues and our respect for individual differences and preferences.

Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Community Background/ Religion and Political (N.Ireland)	"Fenian"	Catholic	Some of these terms could also be used to refer to someone from the Republic of Ireland in a derogatory manner.
	"Taig"	Roman Catholic	
	"Tim"		
	"Chuck"		
	"Mick/Micky"		
	"Westies"		
	"Paddy"		
	"Free Stater"		
	"Sponger"		
	"Hun" / "Blacks" / "Black Man"	Protestant*	
	"Prod"	Presbyterian*	
	"Orangie"		
	"Jaffa"		
"Bluenose"			
"Sinn Fein/IRA**"			

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Minority Ethnic Community	"People of Ethnic Origin"	"Minority Ethnic Community"	Using the phrase 'people of ethnic origin' suggests that only some groups are 'ethnic'.
	"Ethnic" or "Ethnics" (e.g. "an ethnic")	"Ethnic Minority"	
	"A person of ethnic origin"		This is wrong because all people everywhere have an ethnic identity based on shared geographic origin, cultural tradition, language or religion.
	"Migrant Worker" / or "Economic Migrant**"	*(See notes opposite) These terms are frequently misapplied to refer to anyone from a minority ethnic community. These terms have specific definitions and should only be used in the correct legal context.	* The term "migrant worker" is enshrined in European law to denote anyone who is working in a country other than his or her country of origin.
"Asylum Seeker**"		*Asylum Seekers are people who have fled their native country because of the fear of violence, imprisonment or torture.	
"Refugee**"		*Refugees are people who have been granted asylum under the UN Convention, to which the UK is a signatory.	

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Oriental Community (i.e. Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Malaysian)	"Chinky"	"Oriental" (but only if country of origin is not known or cannot be determined).	Ask the individual what nationality they are.
	"Chinker"		Only use the term "Oriental" where you cannot determine someone's precise nationality.
	"Gook"	Otherwise.	
	"Itie" ("eye-tie")	"Chinese"	
	"Boat-people"	"Cantonese"	It is also recommended that you ask the individual how they would like to be addressed - e.g. Mr / Mrs Cheung.
		"Vietnamese"	
		"Thai"	
		"Korean"	Do not assume he / she is Chinese simply because he/she looks oriental.
		"Filipino"	
		"Japanese"	
	"Malaysian"		
	"Indonesian"		

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Asian Community (i.e. Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian communities)	"Paki"	"Pakistani"	Ask the individual what nationality they are.
	"Punjab"	"Bangladeshi"	
	"Arab"	"Indian"	Only use the term "Asian" where you cannot determine someone's precise nationality.
	"Ali Baba"	"Asian (if unsure)"	
	"Osama" / "Bin Laden"		It is recommended that you ask the individual how they would like to be addressed e.g. - Mr / Mrs Singh.
	"Turban"		Do not assume he/she is Indian simply because he/she looks asian.

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
African Community	"Coloured" / "Non-white"	"Black"	In most cases there is no objection to 'black' being used as a descriptive phrase, but it should be as an adjective: 'a black person' or 'the black community', not as a noun: 'the blacks' or 'a black'.
	"Half-caste"	"Mixed ethnicity" or "Mixed Ethnic Group" or "Mixed Ethnic Origin" (the acceptable terminology for the phrase "half-caste")	Again, it is recommended that you ask the individual how they would like their nationality to be recorded.
	"Afro-Caribbean**"	*The term 'African-Caribbean' may be used, but only when referring to specific geographical origins.	Historically 'coloured' has been used to emphasise not only the difference, but also the unequal status of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in relation to white people.
	"Wog"		
	"Nigger"		
	"Negro"		
	"Brother"		
	"Coon"		'None of us are 'colourless' and the concept of 'coloured' is rather meaningless. This term must not be used.

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Travelling Community	"Itinerants"	"Travellers"	Talk to travellers not at them. You will find that you get a lot more respect.
	"Gypsy" (if not Romany Gypsy)	"The (Irish) Travelling Community"	The Irish Travelling Community is specifically identified in the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 as a racial group against whom discrimination is unlawful.
	"Gypo's"	"Irish Travellers"	
	"Romanies"	"Gypsy" or "Romany Gypsy"*	* If you have determined the individual is of Gypsy or Romany Gypsy descent.
	"Tinkers"	(See page 29 for detailed discussion).	
	"Knackers"		Tip: Did you know that Travellers have their own secret language called "gammon", "shelta" or "cant" and are very protective of it?

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Elderly	Be sensitive when using terms of endearment or colloquialisms that may cause offence	“Older / Elderly person” “Older / Elderly gentleman”	‘Old’ can carry connotations of being worn out and of little further use. It can also be used as a term of abuse.
	OAP (may be considered offensive by some people in their late 60’s early 70’s).	“Older / Elderly lady” “Pensioner (only if of pension age)”	We clearly should not make assumptions about the value of people based on their age.
	“Geriatric”		It is better to use neutral terms such as ‘older’ or ‘elderly’ when referring to people.
	“Old codger”		
	“Old fool”		Again, it is recommended that you ask the individual how they would like to be addressed.
	“Old lady”		Some elderly people prefer to be called by their Christian name.
			Others prefer to be called by their formal name e.g. Mr Smith, Mrs Smith, or Mrs Smith (widower).
		Do not use the term “spinster” unless asked to do so.	

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Gay Community (Male)	“Queer”	“Gay”	Many homosexual men prefer to be called “gay” rather than homosexuals.
	“Fruit”	“Gay man, Gay men”	
	“Homo”	“Homosexuals” (it may be more appropriate to refer to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals as a group e.g. “LGB”)	Many lesbians prefer to be called “lesbian” rather than gay or homosexual.
	“Fag”		You should address individuals from the gay and lesbian community as you would address anyone else. With respect.
	“Bent”		
	“Gaylord”		
	“Bender”	“Bisexual”	
	“Nonce”		The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 make it unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the grounds of someone’s actual or perceived sexual orientation.
	“The gays”		
	“Gays”		
(Female)	“Perverts”		
	“Dyke”	“Lesbian”	Case law in other areas indicates that the use of abusive language is likely to become defined as less favourable treatment on grounds of sexual orientation, and may therefore be considered to constitute unlawful discrimination or harassment.
	“Lezzer”		

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Trans Community	“Tranny”	“Transgendered / trans person, people or community”	Transvestite is the medical term for someone who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex.
	“Gender Bender”	“Transsexual”	Most transvestites are not transsexual – they do not wish to change their sexual characteristics.
		“Transvestite”	These people are also known as cross-dressers.
		“Cross-dresser”	
		“Drag Queen/King”	
		“MTF” (abbreviation: male to female)	When using terms such as “he” or “she” when dealing with trans people, you should use the appropriate terms based on the appearance of the person you are dealing with.
	“FTM” (abbreviation: female to male)		

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Female	“Love”	It is important to be aware that under the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (6 subsequent amending legislation), the use of offensive or insulting language regarding gender has been clearly defined in case law as potentially less favourable treatment on grounds of sex.	The use of trivialising or degrading expressions in the workplace is not appropriate. For example, there are particular issues around the use of ‘girl’. Adult females should be referred to as women, not girls. For example, no offence is intended by the phrase, ‘the girls in the office’, but we should obviously not refer to adults as if they were children. The terms ‘love’, ‘pet’ or ‘dear’ are considered offensive by some women, and should not be used, because although intended as terms of endearment, they can serve to devalue and or trivialise women.
	“Girl”		
	“Pet”		

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Disabled People	"The disabled"	"Disabled people" or "People with disabilities"	Some of the words and phrases in common use suggest that a disability makes a person dependent, helpless or limited.
	"The deaf, etc"	"Deaf" (Capital "D" - for a person who is born with no hearing) "deaf" (Small "d") or "deafened" (both acceptable terms for people who have lost hearing - perhaps in later life) "People with hearing loss" - (to describe those people who use equipment to hear better)	Their use contributes to the negative image of disability prevalent in society. These terms are not accepted and should be avoided. It is also important to be aware that under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (and subsequent amending legislation), the use of offensive and insulting language regarding disability has been defined in case law as potentially less favourable treatment and a 'detriment' on grounds of disability.
	"Special Needs"		* Although the term "Special Needs" may be perfectly acceptable when referring to the "Special Olympics", "Educational Special Needs" etc.

Group	Unacceptable/ Derogatory/ Slang	Acceptable	Comments
Disabled People (Continued)	"Deaf and dumb"	"Deaf and without speech"	
	"Suffering from..."	"A person who has..."	
	"Crippled by or Cripple"	"A person with..."	
	"Afflicted by..."		
	"An epileptic"	...epilepsy	
	"A Spastic" / "Mongol"	...cerebral palsy	
	"Subnormal / Mentally handicapped" / "Invalid"	...a learning disability	
	"Wheelchair bound"	"Wheelchair user"	
	"Confined to a wheelchair"		

THIS TABLE SHOULD NOT BE USED IN ISOLATION FROM THE APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE GUIDE.

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