

## Record of Decision



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Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)

October 18, 2012

Ms. Irène Bujara, Director, Equity Office

**Vice-Principals' Operations Committee Record of Decision (2012-044)**  
**Approval of the Gender Neutral Washroom Policy**

At its meeting of October 15, 2012, the Vice-Principals' Operations Committee reviewed VPOC submission 2012-44 and approved the proposed policy for gender neutral washrooms.

It has been requested that you undertake appropriate communication with all relevant units.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alan Harrison', written over a horizontal line.

Alan Harrison

cc:

Jo-Anne Brady, Vice-Provost (Planning and Budgeting)

Ann Browne, Associate Vice-Principal (Facilities)

Caroline Davis, Vice-Principal (Finance and Administration)

# Submission Form

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**VICE PRINCIPALS' OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

SUBMISSION DATE: OCTOBER 12, 2012

TRACKING NUMBER: 2012-044

**Topic:** Gender Neutral Washroom Policy

**Sponsor:** The Human Rights Office

**Required Decision/Approval:** Approval of Policy by VPOC

## **Summary:**

The policy aims to support gender variant students, staff and guests at Queen's as well as a number of other groups such as: parents of a different gender than their children or people with disabilities that require assistance from attendants or caregivers that are differently gendered. This policy will allow individuals to have the option of using a washroom or change room without identifying their gender.

In adopting this policy, Queen's will be joining a number of other Canadian universities in demonstrating a respect for the needs of gender variant students, faculty and staff.

The Council on Employment Equity and the Senate Educational Equity Committee support this policy. (Please find attached supporting letters)

## **Implementation:**

The first step would be adopting the policy and then communicating the policy to all students, staff and faculty at Queen's University.

The next step would be new signage. An audit was conducted in July and August 2011. Volunteer students toured over 49 buildings of which 30 buildings had a least one public single-user washroom. In all, they identified and audited a total of 92 single-user public washrooms, of which 33 of those were also identified as accessible washrooms. A total of 53 washrooms would require new signage to convert the existing signage from its current designation that identifies one sex only, to gender neutral washroom signage. Preliminary estimates for the supply costs for 53 new gender neutral washroom signs is approximately \$7,500.00 plus applicable taxes and all installation costs.

The policy also states that the university shall ensure the existence of at least one gender neutral washroom (or change room with shower, where appropriate, as in residences and athletic facilities) on every floor (where washrooms exist) of every newly constructed or significantly renovated building on campus. Further, the University shall repurpose all single-user, gender specific washrooms into gender neutral facilities as funding becomes available.

# A Proposal for Gender-Neutral Washrooms at Queen's

## ***Introduction***

The Transgender/Transsexual Policy Group, a committee of the Positive Space Program ([www.queensu.ca/positivespace](http://www.queensu.ca/positivespace)) is proposing the adoption at Queen's of the following Policy:

### **Proposed Policy:**

**The University shall ensure the existence of at least one gender neutral washroom (or change room with shower, where appropriate, as in residences and athletic facilities)<sup>i</sup> on every floor (where washrooms exist) of every newly constructed or significantly renovated building on campus. Further, the University shall repurpose all single-user, gender specific washrooms into gender neutral facilities as funding becomes available.**

**All such facilities must include signage that makes it absolutely clear that they are not restricted by gender.**

## ***Human Rights Rationale***

Gender specific washrooms and change rooms, facilities that are designated for use by a single gender only, fail to accommodate gender variant<sup>ii</sup> members of the Queen's University community. Both the Ontario Human Rights Commission policy and human rights decisions are clear that people in the process of transitioning have a right to use the facilities designed for members of their felt gender; gender specific washrooms can result in instances of harassment and violence towards those perceived by others as not being of the specified gender. Without the existence of gender neutral facilities, these individuals have no choice but to use gender specific washrooms – an experience that can be uncomfortable, embarrassing, hurtful, frightening, and dangerous. Further, gender specific facilities reflect a gender binary with which many individuals may not identify.

The policy proposed here advocates for the availability of choices; individuals should have the option of using a washroom or change room which does not require identifying as to gender.

## ***Situation at Queen's***

The lack of gender neutral washrooms and change rooms<sup>iii</sup> throughout the Queen's University campus is an accessibility issue. The *Harassment/Discrimination Complaint Policy and Procedure*, as approved by the Senate in March 2000, categorizes the "discrimination in the provision of goods and services, or access to premises, accommodation and other facilities" for trans-identified students as a form of systemic transphobia. This document recognizes that the University must accommodate individuals who are members of particular groups. All members of the Queen's community should be able to access facilities such as washrooms and change rooms in safety and without affronts to their dignity. This is a matter of both safety and dignity for many on campus.

This policy aims to support gender variant students, staff, faculty and guests at Queen's University with gender neutral washrooms. These washrooms would also present an opportunity to accommodate a number of other groups. Gender neutral facilities would assist parents of a different gender than their children, as well as situations in which persons with disabilities who require assistance are differently gendered from their attendants/caregivers. It is also highly recommended that in designing gender neutral washrooms and change rooms, the needs of faith communities to wash in preparation for prayer and to have privacy in changing and showering be accommodated as well, as indeed should be the case for the design of all washrooms and change rooms.

In adopting this policy, Queen's will be joining a number of other Canadian universities in demonstrating a respect for the needs of gender variant students, faculty and staff.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Gender neutral washrooms and change rooms (including showers) are facilities that are accessible to everyone, regardless of gender or biological sex. Often, they are single-user lockable units, although they can exist in multi-stall forms.

Repurposing single-user washrooms may, for certain buildings, require restructuring of other washrooms to assure that gendered access also remains adequate for both men and women. Although the policy sets a goal of eventually repurposing all single-user washrooms, given the configurations of washrooms in a few of our older buildings, retaining a single-user gendered washroom may prove to be the only way to address access for everyone, and would be acceptable provided the need for a gender-neutral washroom was also being addressed. Repurposing will also require signage changes. It is expected that Campus Planning will develop a process to complete the repurposing across campus within a reasonable time. It will also be important for the Queen's community to understand that everyone has the right to use a washroom without feeling uncomfortable or unsafe.

<sup>ii</sup> This term refers to expressions of gender that do not conform to the dominant gender norms of Western culture and encompasses: transgender, transsexual, transitioning, intersexed, two-spirited and cross-dressing individuals.

<sup>iii</sup> A survey conducted under the auspices of the Society of Graduate and Professional Students (SGPS) and the Sexual Health Resource Centre (SHRC) in 2008 of 471 washrooms in 88 buildings at Queen's concluded that only 56% of buildings surveyed at Queen's contained even one gender-neutral washroom. Only two buildings on the main campus and none on West Campus had fully functional gender neutral washrooms on every floor ("fully functional" means accessible to people with disabilities and not requiring a key or other special access). Although at that time the sponsoring organizations proposed a policy to ensure that new buildings and renovations included gender neutral washrooms and to re-label existing washrooms, no policy has yet been adopted. The first phase of the Queen's Centre has now opened with a total of only three gender neutral washrooms/change rooms planned for the entire complex, all of which were originally designated and are currently signed for use of families, one in the pool area and two in the gym area. These were not designed to accommodate trans individuals. Further, the change rooms designated for "men" in the new centre were designed to have exclusively open showers, leaving no options for a trans man, or indeed any other man, who has a felt need for some privacy in changing and showering. In proposing the adoption of this policy at the present time, the T/TPG hopes to foreclose future building and renovation on campus that does not take the accommodation of trans people into consideration.

<sup>iv</sup> Some universities that have taken action:

- McGill has a washroom policy which was "Supported by the Joint Senate Board Committee on Equity".  
<http://www.mcgill.ca/queerequity/washrooms/>
- UBC overhauled roughly 391 single-stall washrooms to make them gender-neutral.  
<http://www.canada.com/vancouver/story.html?id=e96c4e8a-2b06-4b66-95f4-182324e1ca39&k=40658>
- Simon Fraser overhauled multiple single-stall lockable units into gender-neutral washrooms. Further, a guiding principle in their building plans is to ensure the existence of one unisex washroom in each new building.  
[http://pdf.lbs.ubc.ca/lbs/boardreports/november2004/3.1.3\\_physical-access.pdf](http://pdf.lbs.ubc.ca/lbs/boardreports/november2004/3.1.3_physical-access.pdf)
- Western has multiple designated unisex washrooms funded by the university  
<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Canada/2008/12/01/7588386-sun.html>