



## Policy on Gender Neutral Washrooms at Queen's University [2012 – 044]

Category: *Administration and Operation*

Approval: *Vice-Principals' Operational Committee (VPOC)*

Responsibility: *The Human Rights Office*

Date: *Approved: October 15, 2012*

### **Definitions:**

"Gender" is a socially constructed concept which can be described as the social characteristics attributed to sex. These social characteristics may vary dependent on cultural context and that human rights law recognizes the primacy of the individual's self-identification as to gender (adapted from the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#)).

"Transphobia" refers to discrimination, fear, and/or hostility directed at those who identify as trans\* (transgender, transsexual, trans man/woman, etc.) based solely on their identity.

### **Purpose/Reason for Policy:**

Gender specific washrooms and change rooms, facilities that are designated for use by a single gender only, fail to accommodate gender variant 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 that does not require identifying as to gender.

The lack of gender-neutral washrooms and change rooms 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.

**Scope of this Policy:**

This policy is applicable to major renovation and construction of buildings on campus, and to existing washroom signage.

**Policy Statement:**

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.

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

**Responsibilities:**

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.

<b>Contact Officer</b>	<i>Human Rights Advisor and Equity Advisor</i>
<b>Date for Next Review</b>	
<b>Related Policies, Procedures and Guidelines</b>	
<b>Policies Superseded by This Policy</b>	