



## APPENDIX B: USE OF LANGUAGE

This section is to help employers navigate the evolving context in which terms are used and debated and to ensure that communications are effective in fostering an inclusive environment for both clients and employees.

'Social equality' is used here as an umbrella term to highlight the importance of harnessing a vocabulary to achieve inclusivity and balance, narrowing the social gaps between people and ensuring that the contributions made by all groups are fairly rewarded.

The glossary provides short definitions of terms along with some issues to consider when engaging with them to highlight their possible impact on audiences. Sensitivity is critically important in conversations relating to social equality. This means recognising the perspective of the speaker in relation to the audience, but also the context in which the term is used (for example, on a website, in conversations with clients or employees, in a conference speech).

It is particularly important to recognise the perspective of the user of the term with regard to relative privilege, and to appreciate the way that some terms can hold (implicit) value judgements. For instance, terms such as 'disadvantaged' and 'less affluent' can be perceived as negative and unhelpful as they presume 'advantage' and 'affluence' as the norm, therefore (indirectly) undermining the experience of individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds as deficient or lacking in some way.

Terms evolve over time and can be taken up and used for particular narratives and agendas, and this can inform our relationship with them. It is vital to be mindful of this shifting linguistic landscape and we offer a guide to it here.

Crucially, how we describe and relate to factors informing social equality can have a powerful influence over the social problem: promoting positive change or reinforcing and perpetuating inequality. Harnessing an enabling and hopeful vocabulary is a necessary and strategic step towards transforming organisational cultures, fostering inclusivity, and therefore engaging and releasing potential.

Preferred Terms		
Term	Definition	Usage Context
Socio-economic background	Class can be a loaded term. There has been a widespread cultural and political shift away from discussions of class. 'Socio-economic background' is, instead, the prevalent term to refer to the particular set of social and economic circumstances that an individual has come from. Background can be objectively measured by capturing information on parental occupation and level of education.	This is a precise term that permits fair and objective discussion of the influence of social and economic circumstances on individuals' educational and career trajectories.
Social class	While lower socio-economic background and working class are used interchangeably, class is not as easy to define and measure as it encompasses a range of socio-cultural and geographical factors. Objective measures of assessing family income and socio-economic background may not necessarily match up with individuals' perceptions of their social class status. Class can helpfully refer to a range of tacit assumptions and behaviours, from how to dress and talk to food choices and hobbies.	Employees and clients may be uncomfortable with talking about social class in comparison to socio-economic background. Yet the term can helpfully expose the way that class-based assumptions can inform practice and behaviours in negative ways, creating exclusive cultures.
Social justice	Social justice focuses on people achieving through their own choices and efforts, minimising the influence of socio-economic background on outcomes. This means creating the conditions to enable all to reach their full potential, requiring the establishment of just and fulfilling relations between the individual and society. Social mobility is an element of social justice; but the concept focuses on the wider societal and economic transformations required in order to achieve it.	A helpful term to refer to uneven opportunities and outcomes by social background. It grants urgency and purpose to societal and corporate responsibility to achieve change.
Diversity	This term captures the importance of recognising and valuing difference amongst individuals, along the lines of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, age, and disability, for example. It generally refers to increasing the representation of groups that are under-represented in particular organisations.	It is a valuable term to challenge the dominance of organisations by particular groups to ensure a more creative, representative environment. No one group or culture should be seen as the 'norm' by which to define all others. It must be understood alongside 'inclusion'. Diversity in and of itself does not result in an inclusive environment.
Inclusion	This term relates to the meaningful achievement of diversity. This involves creating the conditions to allow individuals from diverse backgrounds to feel empowered and able to progress.	Inclusion focuses attention on the practical organisational efforts required to ensure that individuals are valued and treated equally.
Intersectionality	Individuals do not experience their diversity characteristics in isolation. Policy and practice need to recognise the convergence of factors and respond accordingly. For example, patterns of progression will vary not only by gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background but by combinations of all three.	The term is increasingly used to disclose the overlapping nature of diversity characteristics, and the way that factors can collide to compound the experience of inequality.

Terms to Avoid		
Term	Definition	Usage Context
Under-represented	Underrepresentation is a broad and vague term that often doesn't clearly convey who the under-represented groups are. The implication is that they include factors such as: ethnicity, socio-economic background and current socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation or combinations of them. The term's meaning, therefore, depends on the context. For example, in a firm where the majority of employees are men, women would be regarded as an under-represented group.	Individuals do not commonly speak of themselves as from 'under-represented' backgrounds and it may be an opaque term when engaging clients and employees in comparison with talking about individuals from 'diverse backgrounds'.

Disadvantaged	The term is generally associated with financial hardship, but it is not limited to this. For instance, some individuals may be perceived as 'disadvantaged' because of where they live or because of the type of school they attended.  It is fading out of usage because it presumes deficiency.	We suggest avoiding the term altogether or using it with great sensitivity so as not to alienate groups and contribute to an unequal working culture.
Privileged and less privileged	These terms can be perceived as judgemental, subjective, and value-laden. Individuals regarded as 'less privileged' are seen as 'lacking' in relation to those who are 'privileged', and it therefore reinforces the social distance between people.	Attendance at certain educational institutions can be seen to bestow 'privilege'. This contributes to reinforcing hierarchies of institutions that reproduce social inequality.

Related terms which may be of interest		
Term	Definition	Usage Context
Social mobility	Social mobility has become a popular term, across the political divide, to talk about class, inequality, and poverty. It is widely adopted as a way of describing the importance of creating opportunities for individuals from lower social economic backgrounds to enable them to become more economically successful. Yet, the concept has increasingly become disconnected from economic and social equality – the very factors required in order for social mobility to take place.	The failure to achieve social mobility exposes the need to widen the focus to broader issues around socio-economic equality. Social mobility should not be seen as an end in itself but part of a wider programme to achieve social justice.
Meritocracy and merit	The meritocratic principle is widely used and underpins a focus on equality of opportunity. It places emphasis on the individual and their actions and efforts rather than on the influence of socio-economic factors. This principle is often associated with 'fairness' but does not necessarily give rise to social justice.	By placing attention on an individual's capacity to achieve, it can detract from wider socio-economic factors and therefore lessen the responsibility of organisations to lead change.
Talent	Talent is widely used to convey a sense that an individual has particular aptitude for a certain endeavour, one that many might assume to be innate. In the arts this is often creative and artistic skill. However research tells us that only a very small percentage of talent is hereditary, the majority of the skills we think of when we think of someone 'talented' are in fact more highly correlated with life-long exposure to something, opportunities to learn, and opportunity to practise and progress.	Assuming talent is innate focuses the attention on the individual's potential without taking into account their wider circumstances. It's only in context that we can begin to understand how well someone has potential to do in a particular endeavour.
Taste	Taste refers to individual and collective feelings about art. It is ultimately subjective, but shaped by wider discourse, which is in turn heavily influenced by socio-economic context. Artistic and cultural tastes have been dominated by white, male perspectives for generations, which can make it harder for individuals with alternative tastes to progress with their work.	