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University staff asked not to say 'mother' and 'father' – 19th February, 2021

Level 4

A university department asked staff to stop using certain words related to gender. It issued a list of replacements for words like 'mother' and 'father'. This is to encourage more gender-neutral language. The list includes the term 'gestational parent' instead of 'mother,' and 'non-birthing parent' in place of 'father'. The department says the words 'mother' and 'father' exclude non-binary people, who identify as being neither male nor female.

The department said using gender terms to describe parenthood excludes those who do not identify as male or female. It said non-gendered language is important in discussions about parenthood. The university said the handbook was just a guide to help with inclusiveness and diversity and not official policy. A UK university asked staff to use the word 'chestfeeding' for 'breastfeeding'.

Level 5

An Australian university department has asked staff to avoid using certain words related to gender. The Gender Institute issued a list of replacements for words like 'mother' and 'father'. This is part of an initiative to encourage more gender-neutral language. The list includes using the term 'gestational parent' instead of 'mother,' and 'non-birthing parent' in place of 'father'. The institute's handbook says the words 'mother' and 'father' exclude non-binary people. These are people who identify as being neither male nor female. They feel unrepresented because of gender words.

The institute's guidelines say: "While many students will identify as 'mothers' or 'fathers,' using these terms to describe parenthood excludes those who do not identify as male or female." It added: "This non-gendered language is particularly important in...discussions of childbirth and parenthood." The university said the handbook was, "a guide developed...to assist anyone committed to enhancing inclusiveness and diversity". It said it was not official university policy. Last week, a UK university asked its staff to substitute the word 'chestfeeding' for 'breastfeeding'.

Level 6

Staff at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra have been requested to avoid the use of certain words related to gender. ANU's Gender Institute issued a list of replacement terms for everyday words like 'mother' and 'father'. The switch in vocabulary is part of an initiative to encourage more gender-neutral language. Staff are being asked to use the term 'gestational parent' instead of 'mother,' and 'non-birthing parent' in place of 'father'. The institute's gender handbook claims the words 'mother' and 'father' exclude non-binary people. These are people who identify as being neither male nor female. Non-binary people feel unrepresented in society because of words that refer to males and females.

The gender handbook explains the suggested nomenclature guidelines. It says: "While many students will identify as 'mothers' or 'fathers,' using these terms alone to describe parenthood excludes those who do not identify with gender-binaries." It added: "This non-gendered language is particularly important in...discussions of childbirth and parenthood." An ANU spokesperson said the handbook was just a guide. It said: "This document is not an official ANU policy....It is a guide developed by expert researchers to assist anyone committed to enhancing inclusiveness and diversity." Last week, a UK university asked its staff to substitute the word 'chestfeeding' for 'breastfeeding'.