UCL

Guidance for managers:
supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual staff at work

Introduction

"As the LGBTQ+ champion on the Provost's Senior Management Team, it is incredibly important to me that UCL is a welcoming and inclusive community for all staff irrespective of their sexuality. There is a great team on hand to support and advise managers and I would particularly encourage you to get involved with the Out@UCL network and the allies programme 'Friends of Out@UCL'. If you are new to UCL or taking up managerial responsibility for the first time then I wish you every success in what I am sure will be a rewarding role."

Professor Anthony Smith
Vice Provost (Education & Student Affairs)

Why do UCL managers need specialist guidance?

Sexual orientation can be a complex area, especially for managers who are not lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) themselves, do not know any LGB people or who have little experience of managing diverse teams. This guidance is intended to equip managers with the understanding and expertise they need to meet the needs of LGB people and create an inclusive, high-performing team.

What is the definition of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB)?

Sexual orientation is an enduring sexual, emotional and/or romantic attraction towards others. Heterosexuals are attracted to members of the opposite sex while homosexuals are attracted to members of their own sex.

Lesbian - describes women who are attracted to women

Gay - describes men who are attracted to men

Bisexual - describes people attracted to both men and women

Stonewall estimates that 5-7% of the population in the UK is lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Identity

There are many different ways in which staff and students might identify and describe their sexual orientation beyond lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Please watch the video 'LGBTQ labels and identities' which was created as part of an LGBT History Month event hosted by UCL's staff LGBTQ+ network Out@UCL ucl.ac.uk/hr/equalities/lgbt/lgbt_group.php

The video shows UCL students discussing LGBT identity with members of Opening Doors London, openingdoorslondon.org.uk/about-us/ - a charity that supports LGBTQ+ people over 50 in London.

LGBTQ labels and identities: conversations across generations, UCL students and Opening Doors London youtu.be/8Ehd7ILUgj0

Being out at work

> **"People perform better when they can be themselves"**
> **- Stonewall**

Many UCL staff may regard a colleague's or their own sexual orientation as a private matter. However whether a staff member feels comfortable to be 'out' at work or not (open about their sexual orientation) can impact on their performance. Research by Stonewall has demonstrated that staff who are out at work are overwhelmingly more content at work and consider that their performance improves too. Moreover, UCL's 2015 staff survey showed that staff who were out at work were generally more satisfied in the workplace.

LGB people who are not out are unlikely to complain about harassment at work for fear that if they do, their sexual orientation will become widely known. Those who are not out at work may feel they need to adopt different identities between home and work, and act in a way that is inconsistent with their own identity. They may therefore experience isolation and invisibility because their true self is not known to colleagues.

LGB members of staff are vulnerable to being 'outed' against their will by students or colleagues, perhaps inadvertently. This may have consequences where some staff or students are strongly opposed to homosexuality or bisexuality.

LGB staff should be in control about who they are out to and when. Some staff may be comfortable for some colleagues to know and not others – partially out - so it is not appropriate to assume that others know about a colleague's sexual orientation. Deliberately outing a colleague or student is considered harassment under UCL's anti-harassment policies and, if proven, will be considered a disciplinary matter.

The experience of being lesbian, gay or bisexual

LGB people can face particular issues in wider society, where they can be seen to be deviating from the norm. For example:

♦ They may experience pressure to conform with the 'norm' and have to acquire coping strategies to confront bias and hostility. Knowing that being out can make them more vulnerable to prejudice, and deciding who to trust can be stressful;

> **Heteronormativity**
> Heteronormativity refers to the dominant world view that being 'straight' or heterosexual is the norm. In a society that expects or assumes that people are straight, it can be difficult for those who identify as LGB as they are not conforming to this social expectation; and have to 'come out' to identify themselves as LGB.
>
> Try not to make assumptions about someone's sexual orientation, for example , try use 'partner' rather than 'girlfriend' or 'husband' in conversation unless they state otherwise.

♦ Where an LGB person is not out, they may be concerned about work events and social gatherings where there is an expectation of being accompanied by a partner;

♦ According to research by Stonewall, some lesbians and bisexual women consider that being a woman is a bigger barrier at work than being gay, and so will be wary about being out at work to avoid double discrimination;

♦ There is a conflict for some people between their faith and sexual orientation. Some people of faith can be hostile to homosexuality, which can alienate LGB people of faith;

♦ LGB staff may be seen by colleagues as role models for LGB students and thus it may be assumed that they will undertake all the pastoral care of LGB students, which may be burdensome. There may also be assumptions that an out LGB staff member will take responsibility for LGB issues in the workplace;

♦ Bisexual people may face a struggle for acceptance with either lesbians or gay men, as well as with heterosexual colleagues;

♦ Black and minority ethnic LGB staff sometimes feel they have to choose whether to identify with their ethnicity or sexual orientation, rather than both. They may face racism from other LGB people or homophobia from people from the same cultural or ethnic background.

♦ Some Disabled LGB people may feel that cannot participate on equal terms in LGBTQ+ networks due to the lack of accessibility of certain venues and activities. Some non-Disabled staff may not feel confident in approaching people with visible disabilities.

Harassment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people at work

LGB people, and those perceived to be LGB, sometimes experience homophobia, hostility, harassment or prejudice at work which can go unrecognised and unchallenged.

One of the most common manifestation of this is 'jokes' and banter in the workplace, which managers need to 'nip in the bud' where it promotes negative stereotypes of LGB people or uses offensive language e.g. the word 'gay' in a pejorative sense.

Banter can be fun, team-building, reduce stress and raise morale. However, managers or colleagues should intervene if they think someone is feeling uncomfortable and stop any offensive comments. If in doubt seek the views of lesbian, gay and bisexual staff or advice from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team. Managers who do not take firm action to curtail inappropriate banter and jokes could be viewed as complicit in the harassment and risk low team morale, reduced productivity and complaints from staff.

Language
According to Stonewall, in 2015 1 in 5 people admit to making offensive remarks about LGB people. In just one month, 30% of people had heard offensive remarks about LGB people, but 63% didn't do anything about it stonewall.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/nobystanders.

It is crucial that managers are aware of the language used in their teams, and challenge inappropriate language or words used in a derogatory way. if they hear them.

Other examples of harassment:

- Using religious belief to justify discriminatory treatment of LGB people;
- Asking LGB people intrusive questions about their private life;
- Ignoring or excluding a person from activities because they are LGB;
- Threatening to 'out' a person who is LGB;
- False allegations of sexual misconduct.

In addition people who identify as bisexual could also face:

- Ignoring or exclusion from lesbian and gay events, because they are bisexual;

- Being pressured to identify as either straight or gay.
- Assumptions that they are attracted to everyone;
- Assumption that they are lesbian or gay but in denial;
- Assumptions about promiscuity and judgements about their ability to live monogamously;
- Assumptions that everyone is either straight or lesbian/gay therefore no acknowledgement of their identity.

A note on Trans

Trans issues are distinct from sexual orientation issues, although they are sometimes conflated. Someone who identifies as Trans is someone whose gender identity or gender expression differs to the sex they were assigned at birth. They might have identified with the opposite sex from an early age. Some Trans people describe it as being born in the wrong body.

Sex: the biological characteristics that signify you sex i.e. male or female

Gender: your own understanding of your gendered identity e.g. masculine or feminine. Gender can also relate to socially ascribed norms that signify gender.

Some, but not all, Trans people decide to undergo gender reassignment. This often involves taking hormones for at least a year and they may choose to undergo surgery. Transition at work is a crucial part of the process of gender reassignment. 40% of Trans people are not living permanently in their preferred gender because of fear of discrimination in employment. Examples of transphobia may include:

♦ Deliberately ignoring someone's preferred gender pronouns or using their former name
♦ Disclosing someone's trans history without consent
♦ Gossiping or speculating about someone's gender
♦ Questioning someone's ability to 'pass' as their preferred gender

UCL has a legal duty to protect Trans staff from harassment and discrimination. Voyeuristic, intrusive and personal questions or discussions are unacceptable and probably unlawful. For more detailed guidance on Trans issues see 'Useful information'

Trans: an umbrella term that is seen to be inclusive of anyone whose gender identity or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Trans or Transgender man: someone may use this term to describe themselves if they were assigned as female at birth, but identify as a man.

Trans or Transgender women: someone may use this term to describe themselves if they were assigned as male at birth, but identify as a women.

Non-Binary (also Gender Queer / Gender Fluid): some individuals do not identify as either male or female. It is important to recognise that some individuals may not want to be referred to as either 'he' or 'she', but rather pronouns that are not gendered such as 'they' or 'ze'.

Transsexual: This is an older term to describe someone who has transitioned or intends to do so. While some may still prefer to be referred to as transsexual, many will prefer transgender.

It is best not to assume how someone identifies but to ask which terms they use and the gender pronouns they would prefer you to use.

Reclaiming 'queer'
The word queer has a complex history, and has been used pejoratively against members of the LGBTQ+ community. However the word is being reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community, with some seeing it as an inclusive term that encompasses way of identifying or expressing sexual orientation or gender identity. The word is also used in academia; 'queer theory' calls into question normalised and naturalised constructs such as the gender binary (male/female) and heteronormativity.

Not all members of the LGBTQ+ community are comfortable with this word because of the way it has been used in the past, but some people choose to identify themselves as queer. For this reason, UCL's LGBTQ+ Equality Advisory Group has chosen to recognise this in its name (LGBTQ+ referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, plus other marginalised sexual orientations and/or gender identities).

Being an LGBTQ+ Ally

Listen, learn: With an open mind speak with your LGBTQ+ colleagues, but be respectful if people don't want to talk about their personal experiences. You can get in touch with any of the members of the LGBTQ+ Equality Advisory Group (LEAG) if you have specific questions.

Be visible and lend an ear: Put a 'Friend of Out@UCL' (Out@UCL is the staff LGBTQ+ Network) sticker on your door, laptop, email signature or anywhere else so that people can see it sending a clear message of your support. By being more visible it is more likely that a student or colleague may turn to you for support. Plan how you will respond if they do. It's important to listen empathetically, ideally in a quiet space and in confidence. At times it may be more appropriate to signpost people in the direction of specialist support.

Challenge assumptions: Don't assume you know your colleagues' or students' gender and/or sexual orientation. Remember, even if someone has a same-sex partner they may not identify as gay or lesbian, they might be bisexual or queer or rather not label themselves at all.

Speak up: Banter or jokes about someone's sexual orientation and/or gender identity can be harmful. As an ally it is important not to let others do this and get away with it. Gently but firmly let them know that it's not ok. Sometimes LGBTQ+ people don't want to be the only ones calling people out, and your voice can make a powerful difference to someone else's life. However, please do consider when it might be more appropriate to give the floor to an LGBTQ+ person to allow them to speak for themselves.

For more information or to be sent a friend of Out@UCL sticker, contact out@ucl.ac.uk or the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team equalities@ucl.ac.uk

Equal status of same-sex partners

UCL's policies and benefits package are inclusive of same-sex partners, and managers should advertise this to staff where appropriate. In particular:

- Same-sex partners are considered in the same way as opposite-sex partners
- LGB staff with dependents have the same rights under UCL employment policies as other staff
- UCL's pension schemes have the discretion of paying a pension to partners— both same sex and opposite sex partners— if there is a proven financial interdependence.

Staff networks and support at UCL

UCL has a staff network for LGBTQ+ staff 'Out@UCL' and is open to all UCL staff ucl.ac.uk/hr/equalities/lgbt/lgbt_group.php. The network holds regular networking lunches and events, more details can be found on the link above.

The LGBTQ+ Equality Advisory Group (LEAG) ucl.ac.uk/hr/equalities/lgbt/lgbt_staff.php runs the Out@UCL network and works with UCL senior managers to ensure LGBTQ+ issues are considered and addressed within UCL policy and strategy.

Co-Chairs of LEAG

Sandy Kutty: I'm Sandy Kutty and I am Co-Chair of the LEAG. I joined UCL in July 2013 as Executive Assistant to the Director of the Division of Surgery and Interventional Science. As of August 2014, I am now Faculty Education Manager in the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

I have held a number of voluntary roles in the area of equality and diversity - during my undergraduate degree, I was Men's Officer for the LGBT Society at the University of Kent and subsequently Ethnic Minorities Officer for Kent Union. In 2012, I was Chair of Brunel University's LGBT Staff Network. I have also worked closely with Stonewall as a 'Role Model', sharing personal and professional experiences in order to empower and inspire fellow LGBT colleagues.

Anne Moore: I'm Co-Chair of the LEAG. I'm really happy to have the chance to further all the great work and initiatives which have been undertaken by LEAG alongside the HR Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion team at UCL. At UCL I lead the Marketing and Business Development Team at the Centre for Languages & International Education. My approach to LGBTQ+ equality is one of collaboration and celebration. I am committed to promoting positive attitudes to sexuality as well as gender identities and acknowledging first and foremost when things are good and they work for us as LGBTQ+ colleagues - which I think a lot of the time they do and are well supported at UCL in London.

Top tips for supportive managers

♦ Become a friend of Out@UCL and be an active ally

♦ Do not assume that everyone is heterosexual

♦ Take prompt action against homophobic/biphobic/transphobic comments or jokes, even if you are not aware that you have any LGBT staff

♦ Make LGBT staff aware of UCL's policies, benefits and LGBTQ+ network Out@UCL

♦ Make sure that social invitations use inclusive language e.g. use the word 'partner' as a catch-all term for husband/wife/civil partner/girlfriend/ boyfriend

♦ Encourage all staff to learn more about LGBT issues by organising training or attending e.g. LGBT History Month events

♦ Use people's preferred pronouns (e.g. he/she/they)

Useful information

UCL

For further advice contact the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team
equalities@ucl.ac.uk

UCL LGBT web pages
ucl.ac.uk/hr/equalities/lgbt/index.php

Transgender Issues- guidance notes on inclusive and supportive practice
ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/transguidance.php

Policy and guidance for students transitioning gender
ucl.ac.uk/hr/equalities/lgbt/Trans%20guidance.pdf

External

Stonewall: UK's leading LGBT advocacy organisation
stonewall.org.uk/

Advancing LGB equality in Higher Education – Equality Challenge Unit 2010
ecu.ac.uk/publications/advancing-lgb-equality

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: who provide free and confidential support and information to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities throughout the UK. Helpline: 0300 330 0630 (Daily 10am – 11pm)

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