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# DELIVERING LGBT-INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

Academic provision,  
accommodation, catering,  
facilities, induction,  
recruitment, registry,  
societies, sports and  
student services

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This briefing is part of a series examining the barriers LGBT people face when accessing specific types of services and the actions your organisation can take to remove these barriers. Use this briefing together with the [Service Delivery Toolkit](#), Stonewall's step-by-step guide for delivering LGBT-inclusive services.

While using this briefing, you may want to refer to Stonewall's [glossary of terms](#).

# DELIVERING LGBT-INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

Academic provision, accommodation, catering, facilities, induction, recruitment, registry, societies, sports clubs and student services.

University is a formative time for many students and can be an especially crucial for those who are LGBT. Many can't be open about being LGBT with their family, and university can be a safe place to openly express their identity.

A welcoming university environment allows LGBT students to learn about themselves, grow and enjoy independence. However, this is not reflected in the experiences of all LGBT students, many of whom still face discrimination, exclusion and abuse because of who they are.

Embedding LGBT inclusion in all of your provision and practices will ensure your LGBT students feel supported and a valued part of your university community. Your visible commitment will also reassure and attract talented LGBT students, helping to build a diverse student body.

## COMMON BARRIERS FOR LGBT LEARNERS

LGBT university students experience a range of barriers that can lead to isolation, poor mental and physical health, low attainment and, in some cases, dropping out altogether. Common barriers for LGBT students in higher education can include:

Bullying, harassment and violence in university spaces, including accommodation, teaching, bars and cafes. This can come from other students and from staff.

Incorrect assumptions and a lack of understanding of LGBT identities when accessing student services, such as counselling services.

Exclusion from sport and extra-curricular activity, which may be more prevalent for trans students.

A limited curriculum that's not LGBT-inclusive, failing to engage or alienating LGBT students.

Trans students being unable to access gendered facilities because of harassment or fear of harassment, as well as a lack of gender-neutral options other than accessible toilets.

Financial inaccessibility of courses, accommodation and living costs due to estrangement from family.

Non-inclusive options for title, gender and marital status when registering on university systems.

Unclear processes for students who are transitioning and want to change their details on university systems.

A lack of LGBT-specific careers advice and concerns about workplace culture after leaving education.

Fear of undertaking international study, due to hostile legal and social contexts for LGBT people in other countries.

To fully understand the barriers that your LGBT learners face, you should carry out in-depth monitoring and consultation exercises. For more information on how to do this, see step 2 of the [Service Delivery Toolkit](#).

## MEETING THE PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

Actively working towards an LGBT-inclusive university will not only ensure that students are supported and can thrive, it's also essential for ensuring you meet your legal responsibilities. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) was introduced as part of the Equality Act 2010. It requires all public bodies in England, Scotland and Wales to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people. For more information on the PSED, read step one of the [Service Delivery Toolkit](#).

*"My pronouns and preferred name are not used by my university tutor, and only by very few students."*

*Jan, 19 (Wales), LGBT in Britain – Universities*

*"When going on a night out at the student union at university, I often receive very dirty looks about my appearance which is quite wacky and feminine. I have been called faggot or poof at this place on a night out. I believe it's because of lad culture from the sporting societies and groups associated with it." Constantine, 19 (Wales), LGBT in Britain – Universities*

*"I feel safer to be out at university, though I still play it by ear on a person by person basis."*

*Laura, 25 (East Midlands), LGBT in Britain – Universities*

*"My university has made great leaps in welcoming all students. One facet that greatly pleased me was the introduction of gender neutral bathrooms." Melanie, 23 (Scotland), LGBT in Britain – Universities*

# DELIVERING LGBT-INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

## RESEARCH ON LGBT STUDENT EXPERIENCES

### STONEWALL: LGBT IN BRITAIN – UNIVERSITY REPORT (2018)

Stonewall's LGBT in Britain research found that, while progress has been made in the university sector, many LGBT students still face discrimination and barriers to inclusion because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Key findings included:

More than two in five LGBT students (42 per cent) hid or disguised that they are LGBT at university in the last year because they were afraid of discrimination.

More than a third of trans students (36 per cent) and seven per cent of lesbian, gay and bi students who aren't trans faced negative comments or conduct from university staff in the last year because they're LGBT.

Three in five trans students (60 per cent) and more than one in five lesbian, gay and bi students who aren't trans (22 per cent) have been the target of negative comments or conduct from other students.

More than one in five lesbian, gay and bi students (22 per cent) wouldn't feel confident reporting any homophobic or biphobic bullying to their university staff.

Findings on trans experiences were especially concerning:

Two in five trans students (39 per cent) wouldn't feel confident reporting any transphobic bullying to their university staff.

Seven per cent of trans students were physically attacked by another student or a member of university staff in the last year because of being trans.

One in six trans students (17 per cent) report being unable to use the toilet they feel comfortable with at university.

### NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS: EDUCATION BEYOND THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW – LGBT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION (2015)

The National Union of Students' research drew on a survey of more than 4,000 respondents from 80 higher education institutions in the UK. It explored everyday university life, access to services and academic success. Key findings included:

One in five LGB+ and one in three trans students had experienced at least one form of bullying and harassment on their campus.

Just one in five (21 per cent) of trans students felt completely safe on campus.

Half (51 per cent) of trans respondents have seriously considered dropping out of their course. Of those who had considered dropping out, 67 per cent mentioned the feeling of not fitting in and 65 per cent mentioned health problems.

On average, LGB+ students scored the following statement 3.9 out of 10: "I see LGB experiences and history reflected in my curriculum".

On average, trans students scored the following statement 2.5 out of 10: "I see trans experiences and history reflected in my curriculum".

# KEY ACTIONS FOR YOUR ORGANISATION

## CONDUCT AN IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF YOUR LGBT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

This will help you identify specific barriers at your university and prioritise actions. The most inclusive universities do this in two ways:

**MONITORING** – analysis of the access, satisfaction, retention and attainment of LGBT learners. This should include examining the data of different groups within the LGBT community – for example, how does the data of bi learners compare to that of gay learners? You should also analyse data relating to multiple identities – for example, how does the data of black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT learners compare to that of white LGBT learners?

**CONSULTATION** – surveys or focus groups run in partnership with LGBT Students' Union reps or your LGBT student society. Be careful to seek out a range of voices – including students who are less engaged in these groups, where possible. For example, are bi and trans learners well represented in your focus group? Also, think about where this is needed for specific services – for example, do you know about the experiences of LGBT students trying to access support from your disability service?

Consider the most effective ways to report your findings to the wider university community, including senior leaders and governors. This will help ensure there's strategic focus and support for this work moving forward.

For more information on mapping your learners' journeys, monitoring and consultation, read steps one and two of the [Service Delivery Toolkit](#).

## WORKING WITH YOUR STUDENTS' UNION

Your Students' Union should always be a key partner in your work to create an inclusive environment for LGBT students. They're likely to have influence over areas of student life that you don't. For example, they often govern sports clubs and societies, which can be a crucial safe haven or a place of exclusion for LGBT students. As well as their different forms of influence, working with your Students' Union LGBT representatives will help you can gain a deeper understanding of the day-to-day experiences of LGBT students.

Often, your Students' Union will also be responsible for catering, bars and other trading spaces on campus. Consider how you can share resources with them, such as LGBT inclusion training for frontline staff, to ensure LGBT students' experiences are consistent across all the services they access.

## SUPPORT YOUR LGBT STUDENT SOCIETY AND OFFICERS

LGBT student groups, societies and officers are an invaluable source of support for LGBT students. They provide a safe space for LGBT students to discuss their experiences with peers and can also act as a critical friend to the university, helping to improve your policies and practices. Support your LGBT student group, society and/or officer by:

Providing necessary resources and university spaces to meet, especially if these aren't available through your Students' Union.

Communicating the group's importance to all staff, so students can be signposted appropriately.

Ensuring they're represented and are able to participate in appropriate university forums, such as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) committees and accommodation meetings.

Providing information and facilitating introductions with key staff across the university, so they can raise issues directly with particular teams.

# KEY ACTIONS FOR YOUR ORGANISATION (cont.)

## PROTECT LGBT STUDENTS FROM DISCRIMINATION, BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Anti-LGBT bullying and harassment is still prevalent at university, creating a hostile environment for many students. Simple, proactive steps will help build an inclusive environment:

Ensure your discrimination, bullying and harassment policies are explicitly inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. These should clearly apply to students as well as staff.

Proactively encourage and communicate routes for reporting discrimination, bullying and harassment. Provide multiple points of contact, including student representatives, so students can choose who they feel most comfortable speaking to.

Ensure that each point of contact for reporting discrimination, bullying and harassment is also equipped to identify hate incidents and crimes, so they can provide students with support in reporting these to the police. Security staff will often be the first point of contact when a hate crime takes place and they should also undergo training on handling these cases sensitively.

Continuously investigate and respond to concerns that LGBT students may have about reporting incidents.

Train all student-facing staff on what anti-LGBT discrimination, bullying and harassment looks like, as well as how to challenge and report it. Remember to include all student services staff, academic staff, student staff and any contracted staff who come into contact with students. For more guidance on training frontline staff, see step 3 of the [Service Delivery Toolkit](#).

Run anti-bullying campaigns that are explicitly inclusive of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia across campus. These are most effective when run in partnership with your Students' Union.

Pay particular attention to student accommodation – much anti-LGBT harassment takes place outside teaching facilities. For university-owned accommodation, consider introducing hall reps who can lead on campaigns and provide peer support. You should also explore interventions for students in private accommodation – for example, ensuring that these students know they can still access university support in relation to accommodation issues.

One in seven trans students (14 per cent) had to drop out of a course or considered dropping out of a course because of experiencing harassment or discrimination. *LGBT in Britain – University Report (2018)*

## EVENTS AND GUEST SPEAKERS

Universities are a place to explore challenging topics and debates, and – rightly – are institutions that promote and uphold the principle of free speech. However, like all platforms for debate, universities need to balance the right to free speech with their duty to create environments where all students and staff can flourish, and diversity is celebrated. Speakers who hold strongly anti-LGBT views, such as championing so-called 'conversion therapy' for lesbian, gay and bi people or denying that trans people exist as the gender they say they are, cause LGBT people to feel deeply unsafe.

For internal staff and students speaking at events, your code of conduct should apply and be enforced in the same way it would in any other setting. When assessing the risks associated with hosting external guest speakers at events, we encourage you to think of sexual orientation and gender identity in the same way you would other key aspects of someone's identity, such as race or faith. This helps to ensure that views are exchanged with respect for other people and helps to remove the risk that LGBT people are subject to abuse. You should also consider how you can support your Students' Union to mitigate any risks at events hosted by their societies and clubs.

# KEY ACTIONS FOR YOUR ORGANISATION (cont.)

## AGENCY AND CONTRACTED EMPLOYEES

Many of your key services may be delivered by external companies, for example catering, receptions, security or accommodation. Contracted employees represent your university and can significantly affect an LGBT student's experience.

You should ensure that suppliers' employees uphold the same standards of LGBT inclusion by:

Scrutinising potential suppliers' policies to ensure they explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Scrutinising potential suppliers' training to ensure they cover the needs of LGBT students.

Working closely with existing suppliers to develop joint training or supplying them with your own.

## EQUIP STUDENT SERVICES WITH SPECIALIST LGBT KNOWLEDGE

While training on discrimination, bullying and harassment is essential for all student-facing staff, some teams will require further training on the specific needs of LGBT students accessing their service. These teams might include:

**WELL-BEING, ADVICE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES.** A disproportionately high number of LGBT students experience mental health issues, so it's important that these teams have a thorough understanding of LGBT identities and feel able to sensitively support students, as well as signpost them appropriately. More broadly, wellbeing teams should be aware of local LGBT-inclusive health services (for example, inclusive sexual health clinics) and specialist LGBT healthcare provision (for example, Gender Identity Clinics) so they can advise appropriately.

**HARDSHIP FUND ADMINISTRATORS.** Hardship funds should be available and accessible to LGBT students who've experienced estrangement from their family. This should be explicitly communicated in any application criteria and understood by all staff who may signpost to this support.

**CAREERS SERVICES AND PLACEMENT TEAMS.** Some LGBT students will be concerned about experiencing discrimination when they enter work after university or go on a placement. It's important that your advisors are equipped to give LGBT-specific advice, including on legal protections, how to find an LGBT-inclusive employer and the support available in different sectors. Stonewall's LGBT-specific careers guide, [Starting Out](#), is a helpful resource to signpost students to.

**WIDENING PARTICIPATION.** Stonewall's [School Report \(2017\)](#) found that half of bullied LGBT pupils (52 per cent) feel that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying has had a negative effect on their plans for future education. It's vital that your widening participation team are aware of barriers to access for LGBT students. As a first step, collect and analyse sexual orientation and gender identity data to understand if underrepresentation is an issue, and then consider specialist widening participation programmes.

**INTERNATIONAL OFFICE.** Concerns about personal well-being, due to the discrimination and persecution faced by LGBT communities around the world, can deter LGBT students from taking up opportunities to study abroad. LGBT-inclusive support will ensure that outgoing students feel confident studying abroad and that incoming international LGBT students are fully supported during their time at your university. For more information about putting this support in place, see Stonewall's [Study Abroad – a guide to supporting LGBT students abroad](#).

As a Global Diversity Champion, we can support you to develop LGBT-inclusive environments for your students and staff, wherever they are in the world. [Get in touch](#) to find out more about joining the programme.

**TEAMS WITH PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITIES.** Many staff members will provide day-to-day pastoral support, even if that isn't their central function. This might include tutors, programme leaders, chaplaincy staff and registry staff. Often, students seeking support will feel most comfortable going to a member of staff they already know. You should identify these key touchpoints and consider where training might be needed. This would equip them to sensitively handle issues relating to LGBT identities and signpost appropriately. It might cover your bullying and harassment processes, hate crime reporting and the support available from your wellbeing team. Chaplaincy services may also benefit from researching local inclusive places of worship that they can signpost students to.

# KEY ACTIONS FOR YOUR ORGANISATION (cont.)

## REVIEW YOUR FACILITIES PROVISION AND POLICIES

This might include toilets, sports facilities, changing rooms and gendered halls. Remember:

Students should be able to access facilities that align with their gender or that they feel most comfortable using. This should be stated in publicly available policies.

Staff and students should be reminded to never challenge a student's choice of facilities.

If they don't already exist, you should prioritise developing gender-neutral facilities in your plans to upgrade and improve your college sites. These should be specifically developed as gender-neutral facilities, rather than renaming already existing accessible facilities. Where gender-neutral facilities aren't yet possible, you should ensure that private cubicles are incorporated into gendered facilities.

## SIGNAL YOUR COMMITMENT TO LGBT EQUALITY

The most inclusive universities find ways to consistently communicate their support for LGBT equality throughout the year, in digital communications, at university events, and in their buildings and grounds. Not only does this reassure LGBT students that their university is a place where they can be themselves and succeed, but it helps to set an inclusive culture for the whole student body. It can also be a good opportunity to signpost to your LGBT-inclusive support services, LGBT student reps and LGBT society.

Ensure that these communications reach:

Prospective students – through your website materials, open days, prospectus, schools outreach and widening participation projects.

New students – through pre-arrival materials and welcome week communications.

Current students – through campaigns, newsletters and statements of support from senior staff. These can be timed around LGBT events over the academic year, for example for LGBT History Month.

Though signals of inclusivity are important, to truly build LGBT students' trust, these signals must be matched with action. For example, if you provide rainbow lanyards for your student-facing staff, how are you equipping them to be active allies? And how are you communicating this to students?

For more guidance on communicating LGBT inclusivity at your university, see Step 4 of the [Service Delivery Toolkit](#)

## REVIEW YOUR SYSTEMS FOR COLLECTING DETAILS AND DATA

Your systems for collecting and changing student details affect many areas of a student's experience – how they're addressed by academic staff, how they're addressed in emails and even the name on their graduation certificate. For trans and non-binary students, it's essential that these systems are inclusive and adaptable. Key considerations include:

If students need to provide their gender when enrolling on any university service or system, you should always provide an open text option so students who don't identify as male or female can use their own term.

To be fully inclusive of non-binary students, you should provide gender-neutral title options, such as Mx.

Students should have the ability to change their personal details, including their name, title and gender, at any time on your systems. This should be made possible for current students as well as alumni who'd like their graduation documents and student records changed. Registry and administrative staff should be trained on processing these changes sensitively and quickly.

When a student is registering at the university, you should allow several options for verifying identity, including driving licenses and passports. Many trans people don't want to, or can't, change their legal gender, so requiring them to supply a birth certificate may present an unnecessary barrier.

# KEY ACTIONS FOR YOUR ORGANISATION (cont.)

## REVIEW YOUR COURSE CURRICULUM

By developing an LGBT-inclusive curriculum, you'll raise the visibility of LGBT history, experience and narratives. You'll also demonstrate your commitment to LGBT equality, avoid making assumptions about sexual orientation, and better engage and support LGBT students in their courses. You can begin to do this by:

Equipping lecturers and teachers to use inclusive language, avoid gender stereotyping, and cover LGBT topics sensitively and accurately.

Seeking the guidance of specialists and LGBT organisations where appropriate, for example to include the healthcare needs of LGBT people in medical training.

Running LGBT curriculum review days for individual courses, involving staff and students.

For more information about developing LGBT-inclusive curriculum, read [LGBTQ inclusivity in the higher education curriculum: a best practice guide, University of Birmingham](#) and [Working together towards inclusive healthcare curricula, Cardiff University](#).

## ENSURE YOUR SPORTS PROGRAMMES ARE INCLUSIVE

As well as its numerous benefits for health and wellbeing, sport is increasingly serving as a safe space for LGBT students, where they can find a supportive community and be themselves. However, there remain significant pockets of university sport where LGBT students continue to feel alienated and unwelcome.

Sports campaigns – proactively communicating sports participation as an opportunity for LGBT students to thrive. Within your campaigns, celebrate LGBT role models already involved and encourage clubs to show their support by getting involved with Stonewall's [Rainbow Laces](#) campaign.

Training for sports captains, coaches and staff – including how to create an inclusive environment, step up as an ally, and challenge homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

Work with your sports clubs and individuals to ensure trans students can participate with the teams they want to. Actively communicate that your sports team is available to support with this.

Develop more mixed opportunities for sport. Where clubs and opportunities are already inclusive of all genders, consider renaming them as explicitly mixed (for example, changing 'judo' to 'mixed judo').

47 per cent of LGBT students who do not participate in sport find the culture around sport alienating or unwelcoming. 14 per cent had experienced homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia which had put them off participating. 19 per cent were put off by gendered sports teams, and this rose to 40 per cent of trans respondents. *Out in Sport: LGBT Students' Experiences of Sport (2015), NUS.*

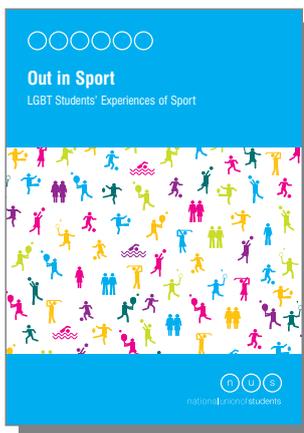
If your Students' Union looks after the sports offer at your university, consider how you can support them to carry out these activities.

# FURTHER RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

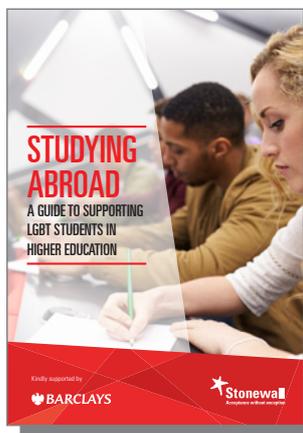


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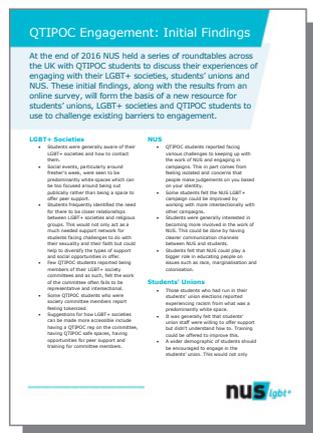
Out in sport: LGBT students' experiences of sport (2015), NUS – [DOWNLOAD](#)



Student voice: setting up a student LGBT group in secondary schools and colleges, Stonewall – [DOWNLOAD](#)



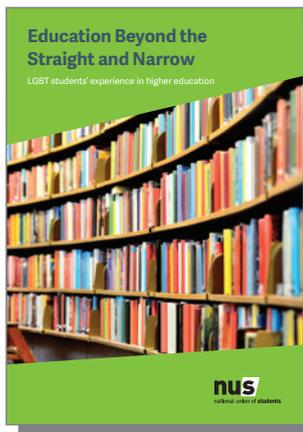
Starting Out: the LGBT careers guide, Stonewall – [DOWNLOAD](#)



QTIPOC engagement: initial findings (2016), NUS – [DOWNLOAD](#)



Pride and Prejudice in Education (2016), the Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equality in Post-School Education – [DOWNLOAD](#)



National Union of Students: Education Beyond the Straight and Narrow – LGBT students' experiences in Higher Education (2015) – [DOWNLOAD](#)



Equality and Human Rights Commission higher education provider's guidance – [VISIT](#)



Student Minds LGBTQ resources – [VISIT](#)



National Union of Students LGBT+ campaign – [VISIT](#)



National Student Pride – [VISIT](#)