

# Advancing LGB equality

Improving the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual staff and students in higher education



Equality Challenge Unit

Written and compiled by **Chris Hall**

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## Foreword

So why might vice-chancellors and principals choose to pay serious attention to the experiences of their lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students and staff? Arguably because there is evidence to suggest that, for too long, untested assumptions about the liberal culture of our universities and colleges being wholly supportive of diversity have been allowed to mask certain failings – which we are now well placed to address.



In 2009, Equality Challenge Unit asked me to launch its groundbreaking research that revealed significant discrimination and negative treatment of LGB staff and students working in higher education institutions. It is sobering, and surprising, to realise the extent of the discrimination our LGB colleagues and students face.

Sexual orientation equality is an area that has so often lagged behind race, disability and gender equality, and I have great pleasure in welcoming this guidance based on the findings of that initial research project. Developed to help improve the experiences of LGB people working and studying in our institutions, the simple and practical steps outlined here can have an immediate and highly beneficial impact.

Within many institutions, including York St John, much work is already being undertaken to improve the experience of LGB staff and students. This is reflected in the encouraging number of case studies that you will find here. However, the challenge of ensuring a fair and equal experience for LGB staff and students in higher education is still to be met. This guidance will be extremely helpful to all of us as we strive to meet this challenge.

**Dianne Willcocks**  
Vice-chancellor, York St John

# Introduction

The recommendations in this guidance will help higher education institutions (HEIs) to demonstrate their commitment to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) equality, become more confident in their interventions, and break down the perception revealed by ECU research that sexual orientation equality sits low in the perceived hierarchy of equality work.

The guidance will help HEIs to meet existing and future legislation protecting staff and students from discrimination and take steps towards proactively advancing LGB equality.

Meeting the legislation is only one reason for advancing equality. There is compelling evidence that demonstrating a commitment to LGB equality makes sound business sense. ECU research has found that one in seven LGB students and staff chose to study or work at their institution because it positively illustrated a commitment to LGB equality.

A recent ECU publication – *The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans staff and students in higher education* (2009) ([www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/lgbt-staff-and-students-in-he](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/lgbt-staff-and-students-in-he)), hereafter referred to as the ECU research – highlighted a number of significant concerns, including the barriers and negative treatment that lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) staff and students face while working or studying within higher education because of their sexual orientation or trans identity. This guidance has been produced in response to those findings. It contains practical information and case studies, and signposts existing guidance to help institutions to address the concerns revealed by the research, and to take practical steps to meet the requirements of equalities legislation. While HEIs should be taking strategic steps to address the inequalities identified by the research, the guidance contains a number of recommendations for small, low-cost changes that HEIs can quickly take forward, which in themselves could make a significant contribution to improving the experiences of higher education for LGB staff and students.

This publication aims to help staff and student services, student accommodation and estates departments, the executive, and, in some sections, students' unions and human resources, to improve the experience of LGB staff and students in the sector. It addresses the main areas of concern that were raised in the ECU research:

## Current legislative framework

- = legislative framework and rights
- = identifying and addressing homophobia and homophobic behaviour
- = visibility and commitment to LGB equality
- = discrimination in student accommodation
- = discrimination in clubs and societies
- = developing and sustaining peer-support mechanisms
- = supporting estranged students
- = monitoring sexual orientation
- = issues relating to sexual orientation and religion and belief

Although it does not specifically address issues relating to trans staff and students, much of the guidance contained in this publication is applicable. Further specific guidance is covered by another recent ECU publication, *Trans staff and students in higher education* ([www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/trans-staff-and-students-in-he-revised](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/trans-staff-and-students-in-he-revised)).

## Current legislative framework

As legislation develops, it is likely that duties will be placed on HEIs not only to prevent and address discrimination, but also proactively to advance equality for LGB people. Information on the latest legislative developments can be found on the ECU website.

The **Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003)** protect employees and students (and prospective employees and students) from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Heterosexual people as well as LGB people are protected by this legislation, which the courts have interpreted to extend to discrimination on the grounds of 'perceived' sexual orientation.

It is unlawful, under the regulations, to:

- = discriminate directly – to treat some people less favourably because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation
- = discriminate indirectly – to apply a criterion, provision or practice that disadvantages people of a particular sexual orientation

- = harass – to violate a person’s dignity or create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them through unwanted conduct, having regard to all the circumstances, including the perception of the victim
- = victimise – to treat a person less favourably than others because they have made, or intend to make, a complaint or allegation, or have given evidence in relation to a complaint of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation

The **Civil Partnership Act (2004)** introduced rights for people in same-sex relationships who register as couples, affording them entitlement to the same employment benefits as married couples. It is good practice, however, for HEIs to offer the same rights and benefits to all staff, regardless of whether they are single, or are in a same-sex or opposite-sex couple, regardless of whether partnerships are legally recognised.

*An HEI advertises its career networking for staff to attend along with their husbands or wives.*

The language of the invitation can discriminate against LGB people with civil partners.

The **Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2007)** have made it unlawful for anyone either providing goods, facilities or services, or managing premises, to discriminate against a person on the grounds of sexual orientation. Students and prospective students at HEIs are covered under the legislation, as it includes educational establishments. The Act also covers students’ unions, student accommodation, and any tertiary services, such as catering.

*A gay couple are refused entry by security staff to a free event, run by the students’ union, designed to introduce students to one another.*

Under the regulations it is unlawful to refuse someone entry to premises, or to refuse to provide a service to someone, on grounds of sexual orientation, irrespective of the event’s purpose. It does not matter under the regulations that the goods or services are being provided free of charge.

## Identifying and addressing homophobia and homophobic behaviour

*A gay student and his partner come to the accommodation office to enquire about suitable accommodation for their second year. Once they have gone, a temporary member of staff makes an offensive observation about the couple's sexual orientation in front of other students and colleagues.*

Intervention is required here – it is the responsibility of managers to intervene and reinforce that such behaviours contravene institutional guidance and can result in disciplinary action. Advice and training should be given. Colleagues should also point out inappropriate behaviour to colleagues, and if necessary raise the issue with managers.

Information on the legislation protecting the rights of trans staff and students is covered in the ECU publication *Trans staff and students in higher education* ([www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/trans-staff-and-students-in-he-revised](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/trans-staff-and-students-in-he-revised)).

### Interface between sexual orientation and religion and belief

Homophobic behaviour is never appropriate, irrespective of whether it is based on a person's religion or belief. Case law has increasingly illustrated that this is the case, for example **London Borough of Islington v. Ladele**: see ECU's religion and belief webpages for the latest developments ([www.ecu.ac.uk/subjects/religion-and-belief](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/subjects/religion-and-belief)).

Further information is included under 'Sexual orientation and religion or belief'.

## Identifying and addressing homophobia and homophobic behaviour

Many HEIs strive to be inclusive organisations for their staff and students. However, the ECU research revealed a high incidence of homophobic behaviour, especially 'low-level' homophobia such as derisory comments or homophobic 'banter'. Over a third of LGB staff and nearly half of LGB students felt they had been treated negatively by their peers. Over time, low-level homophobia can be shown to have a real and sustained corrosive impact on the confidence, studies and lives of LGB students and staff. The ECU research findings suggest, however, that the number of serious physical and sexual homophobic assaults committed against LGB people in HEIs appears to be low.



## Identifying and addressing homophobia and homophobic behaviour

A large proportion of homophobic discrimination occurs through ignorance, a lack of understanding about the issues and barriers LGB people face, and because some homophobic behaviour goes unchallenged. HEIs have a role to play in challenging unacceptable behaviours. Equipping staff and students with the skills and confidence to recognise and address low-level as well as more serious homophobic behaviour and language is crucial to advancing equality.

Homophobic behaviour that may go unchallenged can include:

- = engaging in 'banter' or making jokes that are degrading to a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation
- = casual use of the word 'gay' or 'lesbian' in a generally pejorative context
- = discussing or revealing the sexual orientation of colleagues who are not 'out' in the workplace
- = making assumptions and judgments about people because of their sexual orientation
- = using religion or belief as a basis to defend discrimination against, or harassment of, LGB people

HEIs can help challenge these behaviours by:

- = recognising that homophobia exists and needs to be addressed in our HEIs
- = securing senior-level commitment to address incidents of homophobic behaviour
- = ensuring that bullying and harassment policies state explicitly that any form of harassment based on sexual orientation will not be tolerated
- = providing examples, such as those above, of what constitutes bullying and harassment
- = providing training to all staff and students so that they:
  - understand their responsibilities and can identify and challenge behaviours that support LGB discrimination
  - have the confidence to address homophobic behaviour in others when it occurs
- = making such training mandatory wherever possible, for example during student and staff inductions

## Identifying and addressing homophobia and homophobic behaviour

- = providing well publicised, confidential routes for staff and students to report discriminatory behaviour as well as named contacts for staff and students to contact for advice
- = collecting data on the number of bullying, harassment and discrimination complaints on the basis of sexual orientation that are received (although the number of complaints will probably not be an accurate reflection of the number of actual incidents)
- = incorporating LGB learner issues into institutional improvement programmes

**London South Bank University's** equality and diversity policy, which was developed in consultation with staff and students, outlines behaviour that will not be tolerated. It states: 'Homophobic abuse, harassment or bullying – eg, name calling or derogatory jokes, unacceptable or unwanted behaviours, intrusive questions, verbal heterosexual comments or innuendo including comment made in the course of lectures, tutorials, meetings or interviews is a serious disciplinary offence, and will be dealt with under the appropriate procedure.'

**University of Central Lancashire** has developed a comprehensive training programme based on roles and responsibilities, which is being delivered to all staff over a three-year period. It contains an element that is specifically targeted to help senior managers consider equality and diversity issues at a strategic level. Other training includes specially designed courses for academic and support staff. Each business area has also nominated an equality and diversity lead to attend a six-day certificated training course covering all equality strands. The training uses key findings from the ECU research to lend weight to the significance of the issues and problems.

**University of Hertfordshire** has compulsory equality and diversity training for all new staff, and also has a separate compulsory equality and diversity session as part of the professional development programme for staff new to teaching. Both use scenarios and examples that ask participants to consider how they can promote equality on grounds of sexual orientation in their particular roles.

## Identifying and addressing homophobia and homophobic behaviour

**University of Leeds** delivers 'values' training to frontline staff in estates services and residential and commercial services. The aim of this 90-minute session, which utilises a DVD called *Sexual orientation: respecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people in the workplace*, is to ensure participants understand key terms such as 'diversity' and 'values', as well as the concepts of harassment and bullying, and the appropriate use of language in the workplace. The training is found to be extremely successful in countering the occurrence of low-level homophobic behaviour and language.

[www.skillboosters.com/diversity\\_solutions\\_sexual\\_orientation.html](http://www.skillboosters.com/diversity_solutions_sexual_orientation.html)

**Newcastle University** has joined local organisations in Newcastle's ARCH initiative to train key staff as anti-discrimination reporters dealing specifically with racial and homophobic incidents. ARCH is a group of organisations working together to obtain the right help for victims of homophobic and racist hate crimes, and to help take action against the attackers.

[www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/harassment#what](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/harassment#what)

### Resources

The **Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** publishes a postcard *Twelve steps to tackling discrimination and promoting equality* that highlights the steps educational institutions can take to address discrimination and promote equality. [www.lluk.org/forum-twelve-steps-to-tackling-discrimination.htm](http://www.lluk.org/forum-twelve-steps-to-tackling-discrimination.htm)

**Stonewall's** workplace guide *Bullying: preventing the bullying and harassment of gay employees* helps organisations identify what constitutes homophobic behaviour and the steps they can introduce to begin to tackle it, including the development of bullying and harassment policies.

[www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/1473.asp#bullying](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/1473.asp#bullying)

**University of Leeds** has a video for new and potential students about life at the university from an equality and diversity perspective, which includes a section on support and facilities for LGB students. [www.equality.leeds.ac.uk](http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk)

# Raising visibility and demonstrating commitment to LGB equality

Raising the visibility of LGB issues is key to demonstrating a commitment to LGB equality, and to addressing hidden and casual LGB discrimination.

Developing an inclusive environment helps improve the morale of all staff and students. This makes good business sense and has a positive impact in terms of staff and student recruitment, retention and performance (Guasp and Balfour, 2008).

HEIs should consider how they can embed LGB equality strategically into their corporate planning cycles. There are also a number of simple and quick steps that HEIs should consider taking now in order to help advance equality, increase visibility, and demonstrate commitment to LGB staff and students.

- = Nominate a senior manager who will actively champion LGB equality and ensure LGB issues remain strongly represented at the highest level.
- = Ensure marketing materials include indications to the LGB community that the institution is inclusive, such as featuring pictures of pride events attended or supported.
- = Ensure that information is provided on the support and networks available for LGB people at the HEI, both on the website and in information sent to prospective staff or students.
- = Ensure information sent to staff and students on activities and services available in the area also includes information on local gay venues and services.
- = Ensure health and safe sex information distributed to students covers information pertinent for all students and has regard of all sexual orientations.
- = Target appropriate additional information about the UK context (for example, information about the UK's age of consent and safe sex information) to international students in student handbooks or induction packs.
- = Ensure all job applicants, prospective students, and existing staff and students are given easy access to the HEI's equal opportunities policy and policy on bullying and harassment (both of which must cover conduct on grounds of sexual orientation) to demonstrate the institution's commitment to address such conduct.

## Raising visibility and demonstrating commitment to LGB equality

- = Advertise job vacancies in LGB media.
- = Make sure family-friendly policies clearly include same-sex families.
- = Place posters around the HEI highlighting the institution's commitment to LGB equality. Posters may be especially effective in health centres, student accommodation and teaching spaces.
- = Ensure welfare advice includes sections on LGB issues.
- = Support LGBT history month in February. [www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk)
- = Become a member of Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme to demonstrate to staff and students that the institution is committed to advancing equality. A list of members can be found on Stonewall's website. [www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/currentmembers](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/currentmembers)
- = Hold diversity events that focus on LGB issues.

**University of Salford's** vice-chancellor recently led its delegation at Manchester Pride, sending strong signals to LGB staff and students that they will be welcome and included at the university, and that LGB equality is taken seriously. Salford is also a member of Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme.

**University of Sheffield** held an event called Out@work, a high-profile day of events that looked at all aspects of sexual orientation equality, from the law to LGB health and support networks. It was set up to raise visibility of the university's LGB employees, and it is hoped that an LGB network will be created as a result of the day. [www.shef.ac.uk/hr/equality/events/outatwork.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/equality/events/outatwork.html)

**University of Warwick** has held lunchtime sessions called 'What's it got to do with work?', in which participants discussed issues around sexual orientation harassment and the relevance of sexual orientation equality in the workplace. Participants were able to put questions and concerns to the equality and diversity team for answers and clarification of issues. Sessions like this allow staff to explore questions in a safe and managed environment, and can help avoid potential future conflicts or prejudices developing.

## Raising visibility and demonstrating commitment to LGB equality

**Canterbury Christ Church University** (a Church of England Foundation University) joined Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme to signal to current and prospective LGB staff and students that its ethos is to welcome people from all sections of the population, whatever their sexual orientation, race or religion. It has also produced a university position paper on sexual orientation, which includes a series of recommended actions and a section on the Church of England and human sexuality.

**Staffordshire University** has produced leaflets covering each of the equality strands. *What's it got to do with... sexual orientation equality?* outlines the rights and responsibilities of staff and students to address discrimination, along with information on the university's policies on bullying and harassment, and where victims of discrimination can go for support. The leaflets have been distributed to all staff with their payslips, are linked to the university's website, and are generally available to students. [www.staffs.ac.uk/about\\_us/university\\_departments/equality\\_and\\_diversity/sexual\\_orientation](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/about_us/university_departments/equality_and_diversity/sexual_orientation)

## Resources

Guasp, A. and Balfour, J. (2008) *Peak performance: gay people and productivity*. Stonewall, London.

[www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/peakperformance](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/peakperformance)

Sets out the case for the inclusion of LGB staff and students in HEIs.

Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme works with HEIs to promote lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in the workplace.

[www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversitychampions)

UNISON (2009) *Bargaining for lesbian, gay and bisexual workers rights*. Factsheet. UNISON Membership Participation Unit, London.

[www.unison.org.uk/out/docs\\_list.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/out/docs_list.asp)

Includes checklists of good employment practice, including how best to support LGB employees.

University and College Union (UCU) has produced a number of resources on LGB rights, including checklists and guidance on the rights of LGB people at work.

[www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2310](http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2310)

# Addressing homophobia in student accommodation

ECU's research (*The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans staff and students in higher education*) has shown that LGB students avoid places where they are likely to experience discrimination. However, it is difficult for students to avoid conflict in their halls of residence, so when conflict does arise it can have extremely serious consequences for those involved.

HEIs should not assume that all students are aware of what constitutes acceptable behaviour in university accommodation. Homophobic behaviour may have been acceptable or unchallenged in their previous environment and home. HEIs are often vicariously liable for the behaviour of students towards one another in halls, so should be taking steps to address discrimination.

HEIs should not assume that a student who has experienced homophobic behaviour, or is experiencing other difficulties related to their sexual orientation, would automatically know that they are welcome to raise these issues with a warden or other frontline member of staff. HEIs must be explicit about the fact that wardens or other welfare services exist to support students when they encounter such issues, otherwise some students will simply remain silent.

The majority of student accommodation in England and Wales is covered by either the **Accreditation Network UK** (ANUK, 2008) or **Universities UK** (UUK, 2006) code of practice for purpose-built student accommodation. Both codes have sections covering equality and diversity, discipline and anti-social behaviour, which can provide a framework for beginning to look at issues of homophobia in halls.

HEIs can take the following steps to prevent and address homophobia in student accommodation.

- = Introduce compulsory equality and diversity training for all accommodation staff and wardens so that they can recognise and deal with LGB bullying and discrimination before it escalates. Include training for facilities and services staff so that they know how to respond if they witness homophobic behaviour.

## Addressing homophobia in student accommodation

- = Ensure information about reporting mechanisms and institutional policy in this area is covered in welcome meetings, inductions and introductory social events for incoming students.
- = Make it explicit in accommodation contracts that bullying and harassment on any grounds will result in the perpetrator's university accommodation being withdrawn.
- = Use handbooks, posters and accommodation websites to make the HEI's position on homophobic behaviour clear to students.
- = Consider introducing facilitated conversation schemes or mediation so that students can raise concerns, issues or fears with other students in a controlled and safe environment.
- = Have a named member of staff in your accommodation and student support services for students to contact if they are experiencing negative treatment. Advertise this information on accommodation noticeboards, as students may not know where to go when problems arise.
- = Ensure any private accommodation providers that are partners of the HEI are selected under equality-proofed procurement processes, and that they reflect the HEI's commitment to equality principles, policies and practices.
- = Follow the checklist provided in the ECU guide *Handbook for student accommodation providers: support and guidance for equality and diversity* (ECU, 2009).

**Imperial College London** provides diversity training for all its wardens and subwardens, which includes information on how to recognise and respond to homophobic and discriminatory behaviour.

**University of Chester** operates a senior residential tutor and hall warden system for all university-owned accommodation. All hall wardens receive diversity and equality training as part of their training programme each year. This focuses on the rights of students, and the role of the hall warden in informing students and reporting incidents to student support and guidance. This year, posters were distributed in all halls advertising student support and guidance and the hate crime report centre.



### Resources

ANUK (2008) *Code of standards for larger residential developments*. Accreditation Network UK/Unipol Training, Leeds. [www.anuk.org.uk/LargeCode](http://www.anuk.org.uk/LargeCode)

ECU (2008) *Inclusive campus: accommodation and social space*. Equality Challenge Unit, London. [www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/inclusive-campus](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/inclusive-campus)

Provides advice about the steps HEIs should follow in order to be more generally inclusive to all sections of the community.

ECU (2009) *Handbook for student accommodation providers: support and guidance for equality and diversity*. Equality Challenge Unit, London.

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/student-accommodation-providers-handbook](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/student-accommodation-providers-handbook)

Provides a checklist for equality in student accommodation.

UUK (2006) *Code of practice for the management of student housing*. Universities UK/SCOP, London. [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/PolicyAndResearch/Guidance/AccommodationCodeofPractice](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/PolicyAndResearch/Guidance/AccommodationCodeofPractice)

## Addressing homophobia in student clubs and societies

Clubs and societies form an important part of the student experience, but many LGB students choose to avoid organisations where they fear potential discrimination. As highlighted in the ECU research, this may be more likely to be true in sports or military-based clubs and societies, for example.

Students' unions and HEIs should be working together to ensure clubs and societies are inclusive, as well as tackling any discrimination and bullying that is taking place within them.

HEIs should support students' unions to:

- = ensure club and society members agree to comply with the institution's bullying and harassment policies as a prerequisite of membership
- = enforce university sanctions for members that contravene policies, even if the discrimination takes place away from HEI sites

## Developing and sustaining peer support mechanisms

- = provide diversity training for club and society executive teams to equip them with the skills to recognise, and the confidence to address, homophobia and other forms of discrimination

**Newcastle University** union society has changed its structure to ensure the LGBT officer has representation on the main committee. This year it has also introduced a new LGBT forum. This meets once a month to discuss various topics relating to LGBT students and LGBT matters in wider society. This feeds into the diversity executive committee within the union to ensure LGBT issues, concerns and opinions are heard and considered by a whole spectrum of 'diversity reps' before any potential policy motions go to union council. All students feed into the university's main diversity committee and diversity advisory group.

## Resources

ECU (2008) *Inclusive students' unions: equality and diversity in practice*. Equality Challenge Unit, London.

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/inclusive-students-unions-equality-and-diversity](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/inclusive-students-unions-equality-and-diversity)

NUS (undated) *LGBT handbook*. National Union of Students, London.

[http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/LGBT\\_handbook\\_web.pdf](http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/LGBT_handbook_web.pdf)

Includes much information on networks and societies.

## Developing and sustaining peer support mechanisms

Networks, student societies and consultation forums are important mechanisms for supporting LGB staff and students. They can also provide an important conduit through which the HEI can understand and meet the needs of LGB staff and students. They can:

- = increase the visibility of LGB people on campus
- = provide a forum for networking and socialising and provide a means of peer support
- = enable the institution to engage better with LGB staff and students
- = help the HEI demonstrate a commitment to LGB equality and meet equality legislation

HEIs should aim to provide different methods of support depending on the functions and aims of the networks and societies, to ensure both staff and students receive the assistance they require.

### **Student societies**

LGB students find that LGBT student societies in universities and colleges (the majority of student groups will include trans people in their activity) often provide a vitally important and supportive space in which they can come out to their peers. They also create an opportunity for those students to meet and socialise with other LGB students, and can be invaluable for sharing information that otherwise may not be apparent, such as which GP services in the area offer the most inclusive LGB support.

Many student societies are run by students through the local students' union. However, this often relies on the willingness of individual students to run the society. Given the crucial welfare-related role that LGB student societies generally play, HEIs and students' unions should take steps to support the existence and success of these networks and ensure they survive the vulnerability of annual student turnover – it is far more difficult to establish a new society than to maintain an existing one.

The ECU research has identified that even where societies exist, there may be a gap of network provision for certain groups of students, notably postgraduate and mature students. HEIs should be prepared to support the development of several student societies or networks to cater for different subsections of the HEI's student LGB population.

HEIs can support the development or maintenance of student societies and networks through:

- = ensuring there is a named member of university staff who is the official institutional liaison for the students' union group
- = nominating a named member of university or students' union staff as responsible for supporting the existence of student-led societies or networks
- = supporting the development of an LGB webpage to enable prospective members to find information on the society in confidence

## Developing and sustaining peer support mechanisms

- = providing a safe space and refreshments for society and network meetings
- = promoting the existence of the society and networks in literature and student services bulletins
- = ensuring emails from the LGB society and networks are not blocked by spam filters because they include the words 'gay' and 'lesbian'
- = working with other LGB organisations in the area to provide the widest range of opportunities for LGB students to find space and activities that suit their requirements

**University of the West of England** LGBT student society, OUT UWE, has its own webpage on the UWE students' union website ([www.uwesu.net/outuwe](http://www.uwesu.net/outuwe)), as well as a Facebook page where students can share information about upcoming events and topical issues or concerns. This provides a portal where people who may be interested in finding out more about the society can do so in an anonymous way.

**University of Cambridge** has worked with other organisations from across Cambridgeshire to promote partnership working and information-sharing between LGBT groups. The university has facilitated an 'LGBT links' forum that brings together representatives from LGBT staff networks in other public sector organisations to identify common concerns and benefit from each other's experiences. To celebrate LGBT history month, the university worked together with the local LGBT umbrella organisation to develop and promote a wide range of different events that are open to all in the region.

## Staff networks

Staff networks, like student societies, enable LGB staff to organise social events, contribute to policy development, feed into consultations and advise the institution on a range of issues affecting LGB staff. They can also provide support for career development and peer mentoring.

It is important to recognise that some HEI networks will want to be run autonomously by LGB staff, whereas others will need the support of the HEI. The objectives of networks will also vary depending on many factors, including the type and location of the institution, the priorities of staff, and the needs of the HEI itself, varying from social networks to support groups.

## Developing and sustaining peer support mechanisms

Consulting with LGB employees is important for an institution to be able to meet the needs of all staff. Autonomous networks and groups will set their own agendas, but it is likely that networks would be pleased to contribute to policy discussions, or help the HEI set up a separate consultation forum. If the HEI wants to set up an LGB network as a mechanism through which to consult its LGB population, the terms of reference should make this clear.

In some HEIs staff trade unions organise local LGB groups, and most trade unions have national LGBT events and advice. The ECU research showed that not all staff are aware whether their HEI has a union network. HEIs may wish to work with unions to raise the profile of these networks and establish ways in which the network and HEI can work together.

HEIs can support the development of networks through:

- = providing resources such as meeting spaces, refreshments for meetings or financial support for the network to run events
- = identifying members of staff who might be prepared to run the network
- = circulating to staff top-level messages of support for the network, providing a named senior staff member as a contact, so they will not feel vulnerable if they want to attend
- = allowing staff time to attend the network wherever possible
- = providing information on the range of networks available to all new staff

**University of the West of England** (UWE) allows staff 15 hours of work time each year to attend LGBT staff network meetings and events. This enables members of staff who may have otherwise been unable to attend to do so and demonstrates how the university values its LGBT staff. The staff network has its own webpage on the UWE website, and schedules both social events and meetings to help cater for all members needs. Staff may contact named members of the network to find out more or to discuss any issues connected to their sexual orientation or gender identity at the university.

## Developing and sustaining peer support mechanisms

**University of the Arts London** (UAL) has a staff LGB and trans group and an LGB student assembly. The staff group, which is supported by the UAL diversity team and has a seat on the university's diversity committee, assists staff with LGBT issues and informs policy and best practice. Both the staff group and the student assembly enable UAL to gain insight into the key priorities for LGB people at the university, which in turn has helped it to update its current sexual orientation policy.

**Imperial College London** has established a network, Imperial 600, in response to its recognition that LGBT people within the college can experience isolation and institutional discrimination. To support the visibility of the LGBT population and promote the network, Imperial College produced 600 brightly coloured security card lanyards and 600 badges for staff to wear in support. The network has received top-level support from the rector, who launched it at a high-profile event in 2009. Imperial is one of two HEIs to enter the Stonewall top 100 employers index for 2010.

**University of Newcastle** recognised that there may be a gap in network provision for some students and former students. It therefore made Mosaic, its LGBT network, open to postgraduate students and alumni as well as staff. It has a student society for undergraduate students, which also receives information from Mosaic.

## Resources

ECU (2009) *Inclusive students' unions: equality and diversity in practice*. Equality Challenge Unit, London.

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/inclusive-students-unions-equality-and-diversity](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/inclusive-students-unions-equality-and-diversity)

Provides helpful information on improving structures to represent the needs of different students.

HEFCE (undated) *Staff networks: a guide to setting up sustainable and effective employee network groups in higher education institutes*. Higher Education Funding Council for England, Leadership, Governance and Management project.

[www.ljmu.ac.uk/EOU/EOUDocs/StaffNetworkResourceGuide-AlternativeWordVersion.doc](http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/EOU/EOUDocs/StaffNetworkResourceGuide-AlternativeWordVersion.doc)

Resource guide produced by a project looking at the benefits of staff networks.

## Supporting students estranged from parents

Stonewall (2005) *Network groups: setting up networks for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees*. Stonewall, London.

[www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/networkgroups](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/networkgroups)

Provides guidance on the development of networks and the benefits they can provide to organisations and their LGB members.

UNISON (2009) *UNISON equality and staff networks*. Factsheet. UNISON Education and Children's Services, London. [www.unison.org.uk/file/A10004.doc](http://www.unison.org.uk/file/A10004.doc)

**University of Salford** hosted a 'network of networks' meeting in November 2009 to bring together representatives of networks in existence across UK HEIs to discuss common issues and support strategies. An email discussion group, LGBTnet, has been set up following the meeting to continue sharing information and best practice. <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=LGBTNET>

## Supporting students estranged from parents

As the ECU research shows, for a significant minority of LGB students, financial estrangement from their parents is a real possibility when they reveal their sexual orientation. Estrangement can have a catastrophic impact on the student's ability to remain in education; according to the Department for Education and Skills' *Student income and expenditure survey 2004/05* ([www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u014256/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u014256/index.shtml)) 30 per cent of students who consider dropping out of study do so for financial reasons.

Institutions are limited in the steps they can take to mitigate the impact of estrangement, but the following steps should be followed:

- = ensure estrangement due to sexual orientation is recognised in the eligibility criteria for access to any hardship fund
- = ensure the evidence required to access the hardship fund on grounds of estrangement does not originate with the parents
- = ensure there is a named member of staff in the student advice service who can advise on the estrangement process and liaise with academic staff on students' behalf about absences related to estrangement, if necessary
- = consider making bursaries available for students who are estranged from their parents

## Monitoring the sexual orientation of staff

**De Montfort University** is the first HEI in England to provide a bursary of £1000 a year for students who have been estranged from their parents (as identified by Student Finance England). This is in addition to its existing support packages, and could make a real difference to LGB students' decision to remain in education in the case of parents withdrawing support.

### Resources

NUS (undated) *Evaluating estrangement: a report into the estrangement application process in higher education student finance*. National Union of Students, London.

[http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/Evaluating\\_estrangement\\_report.pdf](http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/Evaluating_estrangement_report.pdf)

Examines the estrangement application process. NUS is lobbying the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills for reforms that will benefit students who have been estranged on the grounds of sexual orientation.

## Monitoring the sexual orientation of staff

ECU encourages HEIs to monitor sexual orientation, provided they have facilitated a safe and supportive environment in which to disclose. They should also have robust and confidential mechanisms for recording the information, and plans and resources to address equality gaps revealed by the data.

An HEI needs to comprehensively demonstrate its commitment to LGB equality and to develop trust in its LGB population. Assurances need to be given that the data collected will be treated confidentially, used for constructive purposes, and not used to discriminate in any way. Reliable data will not be forthcoming unless these conditions are met.

For any HEI looking to work towards improving its staff disclosure rates, it is important to determine why disclosure is being sought. It is also important to consider the benefits that can be achieved through greater disclosure for both the institution and the individual staff member. All staff, not just LGB staff, need to understand the benefits of disclosure.

For staff, the benefits of disclosing sexual orientation information about themselves include:



## Monitoring the sexual orientation of staff

- = contribution to a pool of information that will help the institution meet the diverse needs of staff
- = scope for prompting a discussion with their employer about workplace issues
- = ability to receive targeted information about support or positive action

For an HEI, the benefits of monitoring can include helping it to:

- = identify, address and prevent discrimination against LGB staff
- = show whether the number of LGB employees reflects the national demographic, and whether they are represented across all grades in the HEI
- = provide a basis for changing discriminatory practice
- = build a reputation for supporting LGB people
- = recruit and retain people from the widest talent pool by identifying and removing barriers that LGB people may face
- = raise the morale and increase the productivity of all workers – not just LGB staff
- = avoid risk of legal action through demonstrating that it is taking sexual orientation equality seriously
- = understand whether sexual orientation has an impact on staff performance and retention
- = demonstrate that it regards sexual orientation equality to be as important as other equality areas

There is a distinction between collecting anonymous data, for example through satisfaction surveys or equalities surveys, and collecting data that can be correlated to staff individual records. HEIs may find they receive a higher response rate when asking staff to disclose their sexual orientation in the context of a confidential and anonymous staff survey, rather than on recruitment monitoring or staff personnel forms.

Increasingly, HEIs are reporting growing response rates – and a very positive impact on their workplace culture – after seeking sexual orientation data. Some HEIs have seen trust grow quickly in this area after senior management support and assurances have been provided.

## Monitoring the sexual orientation of staff

The language used in seeking information on sexual orientation is extremely important. The ECU (2009) guidance *Developing staff disclosure* provides useful information about steps that HEIs can follow to embark upon seeking and improving staff disclosure rates.

**Anglia Ruskin University** started to collect data on the sexual orientation of their staff through an anonymous staff survey in 2006. Progressively, they have introduced monitoring linked to individual records, starting with staff recruitment. In June 2007 they conducted a data validation exercise that included sexual orientation monitoring for all staff. A further staff survey in 2009 saw over 90 per cent of staff returning data on their sexuality. Throughout the process, they informed staff about what they were doing and why, and have seen positive developments in terms of staff willingness to participate in equality monitoring.

**Cardiff University** conducted an equality and diversity data collection exercise in 2008; however, the response rate was low at just 25 per cent. The exercise was repeated in 2009 as part of an employee personal data validation exercise. Both exercises were publicly supported by the pro vice-chancellor for staff and diversity and the HR director. In line with Data Protection Act principles, clear statements were provided on why the data were being collected and how they would be used. The overall response rate leapt to 75 per cent, of whom 77 per cent disclosed their sexual orientation. Cardiff is now able to compare the information collected from its LGB staff with that from the wider staff population to identify if there are any specific needs for its LGB population.

**University of Salford** was keen to collect data on the sexual orientation of its staff so that it could identify whether being LGB affected the experience of working at the university. Despite already having undertaken a lot of work on sexual orientation equality, policy issues around data collection remained unresolved until the preparations for the institution's first staff experience survey in October 2008 helped to focus that discussion. Encouraged by its chair, who was at that time a senior officer in the Greater Manchester police, the equality and diversity committee decided that questions on sexual orientation should be included in the first survey. The response was encouraging: within an overall response rate of 48 per cent, only 12 per cent of respondents declined to identify their sexual orientation, and the data that emerged have already helped to inform staff development and training programmes – especially around bullying and harassment. Also, since that first decision on the staff survey, the university has gone on to extend monitoring on this equality strand to other areas of personnel practice, such as the annual update of personnel records and staff recruitment.

### Resources

ECU (2009) *Developing staff disclosure: a guide to collecting and using equality data*. Equality Challenge Unit, London.

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/developing-staff-disclosure.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/developing-staff-disclosure.pdf/view)

Provides information on understanding the case for collecting data from staff, considering how to encourage and enable staff disclosure, and planning how to use the data when collected.

Stonewall (2006) *Monitoring: how to monitor sexual orientation in the workplace*. Stonewall, London.

[www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/monitoring](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/monitoring)

Includes information on how to create a monitoring environment, the need to monitor, data confidentiality, how to collect the data, and what to do with it when you have it.

UNISON (2009) *Workforce monitoring for sexual orientation and gender identity*. Factsheet. Education and Children's Services, London.

[www.unison.org.uk/out/docs\\_list\\_wpr.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/out/docs_list_wpr.asp)

# Monitoring the sexual orientation of students

While a number of HEIs in the UK currently monitor the sexual orientation of staff, few institutions monitor the sexual orientation of their students. This is partly due to issues of collecting data sensitively without the student fearing inadvertent disclosure to their parents, and partly because the main data about students are derived through the UCAS application process, which does not currently ask about sexual orientation.

Understanding the sexual orientation of your student cohort is important to establish if sexual orientation has an impact on retention, progression and other aspects of the student experience. The ECU research found that one in five LGB students had taken time out of their studies because of issues related to their sexual orientation, which suggests that HEIs need to collect data to identify where to place interventions to support their LGB students.

As with collecting data on staff, assurances need to be given to the student population that the data collected will be treated confidentially, used for constructive purposes, and not used to discriminate in any way. If your institution collects data on staff sexual orientation, you can use the positive outcomes and actions from this to demonstrate to your students how disclosure can be beneficial.

As a first step, student satisfaction surveys provide a good opportunity for HEIs to collect data in an anonymous way that encourages student disclosure. As part of a range of questions on student satisfaction, students are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation if they can connect it to the experiences they have, rather than being asked out of context on application or enrolment forms.

Students are also more likely to provide information on their sexual orientation when they are away from their home environment. Enabling students to update their details online once they have joined the institution will increase disclosure rates.

ECU is working with the relevant sector bodies (UCAS and the Higher Education Statistics Agency) to develop appropriate ways of capturing information on the sexual orientation of applicants to, and students within, higher education.

## Sexual orientation and religion or belief

The ECU research suggested that there may be situations where tensions can emerge between LGB people and those of a particular religion or belief (and within those groups). Pressures between different groups may be more likely to occur in shared spaces such as chaplaincies and student accommodation, or in the teaching of certain courses, such as theology. They may also emerge in student unions where orthodox religious and LGB student societies exist.

HEIs can help develop good relations between LGB people and people with a religion or belief by:

- = managing and encouraging dialogue between LGB and religion and belief-based societies to break down any pre-existing misunderstanding
- = holding diversity days that look at aspects of life for different people
- = reinforcing and promoting policies stating that harassment and abuse are not tolerated, and encouraging societies and networks to adopt an inclusive approach to membership
- = ensuring staff and students understand that religion or sexual orientation is not a basis on which harassment can be defended

### Resources

In spring 2010, the **Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** will release effective practice guidance and examples from HEIs and the post-school sector of successful management and promotion of good relations between LGB people and people with a religion or belief.

[www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/sexual-orientation](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/sexual-orientation)

Stonewall (2009) *Religion and sexual orientation: how to manage relations in the workplace*. [www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/religion&sexualorientation](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/religion&sexualorientation)

A number of groups exist to support LGB Christians, including the **Christian Network for LGB** [www.gaychristians.org.uk](http://www.gaychristians.org.uk), and the **LGB Christian Movement** [www.lgcm.org.uk](http://www.lgcm.org.uk)

Dickens, S., Mitchell, M. and Creegan, C. (2009) *Management handling of sexual orientation, religion and belief in the workplace*. Research Paper 01/09. Acas, London.  
[www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=1050&p=0](http://www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=1050&p=0)

ECU has published a number of briefings on religion and belief.

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/?browse=subject&filter=religion-and-belief](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/?browse=subject&filter=religion-and-belief)

Imaan (LGBT Muslim support group) provides information for LGB Muslims.

[www.imaan.org.uk](http://www.imaan.org.uk)

Although every effort is made to ensure the information contained within this publication is accurate and up to date, ECU cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions. The information is not a substitute for legal advice, and should you require more specific advice you should consult an appropriately qualified professional adviser.



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