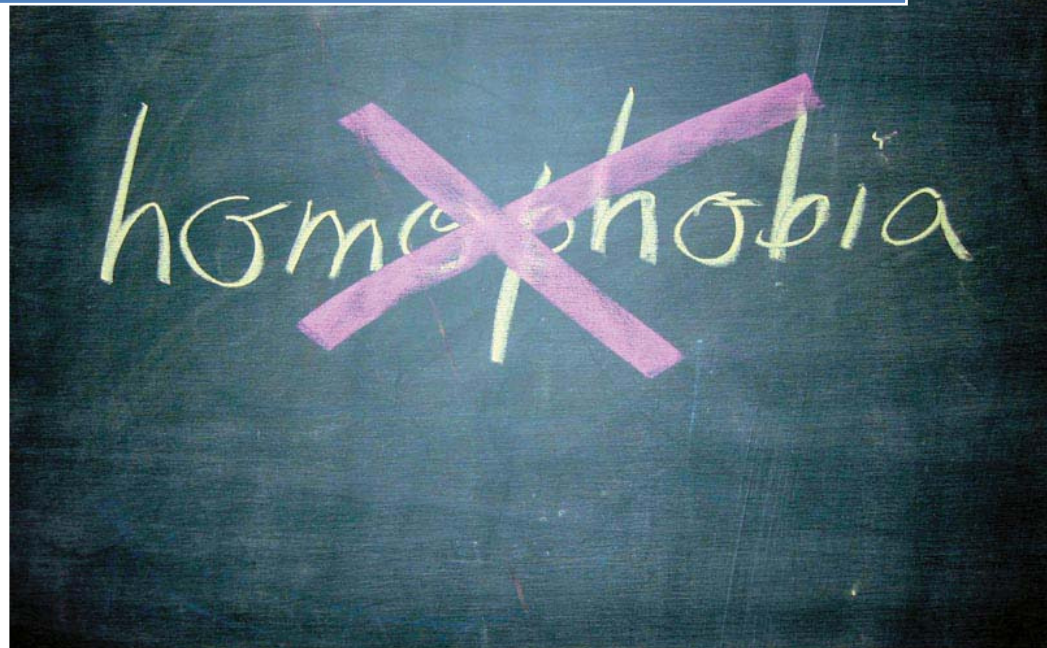


2011

Tackling homophobia and  
transphobia in settings  
supporting young people: What  
are the barriers and facilitators?  
Findings from a South Yorkshire  
study – Executive summary



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## **Introduction and research methods**

Existing research has identified the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools, and the impact this can have on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) young people's mental health and wellbeing, as well as their educational achievement (Guasp, 2009; Hunt and Jenson, 2007; McDermott et al, 2008; Mitchell and Howarth, 2009; Rivers and Noret, 2008; Tippet et al, 2010; Warwick et al, 2004). However, less research is available on how LGBT issues are supported within youth work provision.

This study aimed to gather data in South Yorkshire about views and experiences of the inclusion of LGBT issues within schooling and youth work, with an explicit focus on barriers and facilitators. This summary includes findings from both young people and professionals who work with them, and suggests some recommendations for future practice. It also provides further information in the form of signposting to additional resources and references.

The data is drawn from three sources:

- a self-completion questionnaire for young people, to which there were 146 responses from young people aged 13-21
- eight in-depth group discussions with young people aged 11-20, involving 65 participants in total. Two of these took place within schools and six took place within youth work settings
- nine in-depth interviews with professionals. Four of these were teachers and five were youth workers.

Each of these elements included participants who identified as heterosexual and lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).

## **Findings and conclusions by theme**

Whilst this project was relatively small and cannot claim to have generated universally generalisable results, it does add weight to a growing body of work in this area. Its strength also lies in its focus on barriers and facilitators to delivery, as these issues need to be understood if improvements are to be made.

### ***School coverage and teaching about LGBT issues***

The survey and in-depth methods with young people suggests that there is currently patchy inclusion of LGBT matters within schooling. Recent national research on personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) also suggested that, contrary to government guidance, approaches to homophobic bullying specifically are rarely embedded within the formal curriculum (Formby et al, 2011). Trans issues, in particular, are least likely to be addressed. Staff and young people noted that LGBT inclusion was more likely to be supported (just) within the PSHE curriculum than in any other subject areas or embedded across the entire curriculum. Generally, use of whole-school approaches and/or specific resources, such as LGBT history month, was low, though sometimes youth workers were involved in specialist awareness-raising delivery.

As the majority of young people involved in face-to-face methods had not experienced any LGBT-related teaching, the contrast between this 'taboo' and invisibility within the formal curriculum, and the visibility of homosexuality within informal contexts was stark. This was often related to the prevalence of homophobic language use among young people, but also a 'natural' interest in, or curiosity about, (homo)sexuality. In comparison, some staff implied that LGBT issues were only of interest to LGBT young people, and therefore that the relevance within their practice or organisation was limited. This argument was most often made about trans issues, demonstrating a (mis)understanding that a person identifying as trans would always be visible to staff (and therefore that they 'knew' that they had no trans pupils). Most staff suggested that there was less awareness and familiarity with trans inclusion, and felt that it was not as "easy" as LGB inclusion.

*"Because there are so few trans students at our age group, we're still trying to embed L and G to be honest, and maybe stretch to B. The T issues might be a bit too far out for staff and governors to get their heads round at the moment!" (Teacher)*

It could be argued, however, that equality and diversity issues need to be addressed within schools and youth settings regardless of the pupil make-up, i.e. all young people should be taught about sexism, all young people taught about racism, and all young people taught about LGBT equality.

Both survey and qualitative findings suggest that young people are generally open and willing to learn about LGBT issues, for example 90% felt that learning about LGBT issues was important. Some participants explicitly recommended greater visibility and awareness-raising to try and combat homophobia; it was thought that this might have potential gains for LGBT young people wanting to come out and/or report bullying. This curiosity and relative comfort with the subject area contrasted with some apparent staff uneasiness, as discussed further below.

### **Barriers to delivery for staff**

Both strategic/conceptual and practical barriers to staff delivery in this area were identified:

1. *Not being a priority within the organisation*: this included a feeling that the subject area was “not highly regarded” or that there were “more important things”. Schools in particular were said to not invest time or money for training and resources if it was not a priority. For some young people this implied a lack of care for LGBT pupils
2. *No sex please, we’re British*: this quote from a participant sums up the wide-scale discomfort or embarrassment about sex more generally which was explicitly related to ambivalence about LGBT inclusion. This was identified among both teachers and youth workers, with some thinking it was a ‘grey area’ how much youth workers’ personal views were ‘allowed’ to affect their practice. Anxieties about ‘turning’ young people gay by educating them about same-sex relationships were also suggested
3. *Fear as a barrier*: this was often identified as a key issue by both staff and young people, and could include fears (often unjustified) about parental complaints (potentially tied to “misleading” media coverage), fears about ‘getting it wrong’, and fears about objections from religious community leaders (which were said to be hard to tackle)
4. *Stigma by association*: staff fearing questions or “allegations” about their own sexuality because of their involvement in teaching/supporting LGBT issues was also identified, linked as well to some ongoing staff reluctance to come/be out in professions working with children and young people. This could make staff reluctant to be involved in awareness-raising delivery and/or challenge homophobic language use and bullying
5. *Funding*: this could effect the longevity and effectiveness of support available to young people, and potentially related to diversity strands ‘competing’ for particular funding streams
6. *Skills gaps, staff confidence, and use of resources*: this range of issues included lack of expertise in the area, lack of confidence to approach the subject, and lack of awareness of, or available access to, appropriate resources or training, which could result in misleading information being given to young people.

### **Facilitative support and resources for staff**

Three broad (and interlinked) themes were said to aid LGBT support or inclusion:

1. *Management support and other supportive infrastructures*: the importance of senior leadership team (SLT) support, together with the embedding of equality policies, was often seen as vital for this area of work. A whole-school approach was also often highlighted. Each of these factors gave staff confidence, in addition to the support that could be provided by a specialist PSHE department, more general collegial support and/or a specific LGBT steering committee. External contact networks were also said to provide positive role models and peer support
2. *LGBT champion*: this could also facilitate the inclusion of this area, with one key person (preferably a formalised role) to drive this agenda forward
3. *Confidence, external visitors and supportive resources*: staff confidence, in part related to access to training and/or the ability to tap into supportive external agencies or resources was also identified as important. Sometimes drawing on the personal experience of gay workers was seen to be more “powerful” in this regard.

*“I felt I ran the service better because I’d been there... you don’t know what it’s truly like until you’ve actually experienced it... you’re constantly outing yourself but if it’s making that young person feel more safe...”* (Youth worker)

### **Discrimination, bullying and language use**

Young people identified the existence of homophobic bullying in relation to young people identifying as (or rumoured to be) LGBT, those with parents in same-sex relationships, and those that were perceived to be ‘different’ in some way, thereby marking them out as potentially gay. This included much experience of

verbal abuse, though was not restricted to this. To a certain extent, LGB young people appeared to expect, and sometimes even 'accept', the bullying they experienced. The reported impact of this bullying included (sometimes severe) mental health issues, and problems related to school attendance and attainment.

*"The impact being gay and being out and being bullied has on young people's mental health is colossal... The amount of mental health issues in that group that we know about is immense, the ones we don't know about makes me shudder"* (Youth worker)

These issues were not always thought to be understood by all professionals. Reluctance to report homophobic bullying was common, perhaps not surprising in some contexts where staff were also reported to make homophobic comments to young people, and where school practices (such as not being allowed to change for PE with other pupils) were felt to be isolating to LGB young people.

*"If my son or my daughter was ever gay I'd take them into the back of my garden, tie them to the wall and shoot them with a shotgun"* (Young person reporting what a teacher had said at their school)

There was agreement among many young people that homophobic bullying was not always dealt with effectively by schools. Many felt it was not taken as seriously as other forms of bullying, such as racist incidents, which made some young people feel that their allegations were not believed or respected.

*"They just think it's some kind of joke half the time"* (Young person)

Tackling 'casual' homophobic language use was seen to be even harder, with staff also suggesting this was difficult. There was not always agreement if, or how, these issues should be addressed, partly related to how bullying was defined. Discussions about language often revolved around the extent to which people saw the (negative) use of the word gay as being linked to sexual identity, and therefore could be deemed to be offensive, or whether they believed the two meanings to be unrelated, and therefore it was not an issue in need of 'tackling'. Use of the word gay in this sense was common among young people (both heterosexual and LGB), and also identified among professionals.

There was a clear contrast between those that felt a 'zero tolerance' approach should silence/stop inappropriate language and/or behaviours, and those that felt homophobia should be allowed to be voiced in order to generate discussion and hopefully, in the long-run, changed attitudes. This latter approach arguably requires more (complex) input from staff, and would mean giving young people the space and 'permission' (at least initially) to voice potential disapproval of LGBT identities/relationships.

### ***Signposting and supporting young people***

Signposting local or national support services for LGBT young people was not universal, yet could be important if mainstream staff (teachers and youth workers) were not necessarily supportive.

Often young people wanted their identities to be accepted, respected and understood by staff, which meant staff not assuming that homosexuality was 'confusion' or just "a phase". Staff often highlighted the need for specialist support; where this was not in place some young LGBT people resorted to accessing support services available in neighbouring cities or local authorities, so as to benefit from some form of peer support, even where this was not local to them.

*"If you need help you can get it, and you can just talk to people and make new friends who are in the same boat"* (Young person)

There were differing opinions about whether workers in these services needed to be gay or not to provide specialist support, though some young people said they would prefer that they were. This dedicated support was also seen to be particularly important where young people were living in unsupportive contexts at home, or experiencing related bullying at school. The safety and validation that these environments provided was often said to be crucial; young people often reported fearing coming out to parents and/or staff so appreciated specialist support.

*"This is gonna sound really dramatic but I'd probably be dead if I never came here... because of the amount of bullying that you get"* (Young person)

However, whilst specialist support provision was often viewed as necessary, some staff expressed caution in case it was assumed that young LGBT people automatically needed support. Similarly, some young people also highlighted how being referred to counselling could feel, in seeming to apportion blame on them, rather than for instance the perpetrators of bullying.

*"I was kind of like, hang on a minute, 'coz it kind of made me feel like 'oh is this my fault now, is there something wrong with me?'" (Young person)*

### **Thinking about the future: improvements and support needs**

This study suggests that whilst there are some strong beliefs in equality for LGBT groups among both young people and staff, there are also still views about the 'unnaturalness' of same-sex relationships and a clear view that they are 'different' and 'unfamiliar' and therefore potentially 'wrong'. Whilst some of these attitudes are directly linked to faith values, it was suggested that others could potentially be challenged by greater familiarity and visibility, both within schools and beyond. Those clearly opposed to LGBT inclusion were in the minority among young people.

### **Recommendations**

Schools and youth work facilities are in a strong position to address issues about inequality and/or identity-based bullying, acknowledged by the current Coalition Government (DfE, 2010). New public sector equality duties also mean that schools, like other public bodies, must consider the equality of LGBT pupils (and staff), in addition to other protected characteristics (GEO, 2011).

The recommendations set out here directly arise from data gathered within the study. Their aim is to create a supportive environment for both staff and young people, whatever their own sexual or gender identities.

1. Schools and youth organisations should attempt to embed senior management support for LGBT awareness and support within their service delivery. Where possible, this should clearly be linked to broader equality policies, and in schools adopted via a whole-school approach (not restricted to PSHE alone)
2. In schools, consider having a named governor responsible for LGBT awareness/support
3. Where appropriate, attend to requirements in the Equality Act 2010, and use other policy agendas (e.g. the Sheffield LGBT Charter) to strengthen LGBT work
4. Where possible, identify a strategic LGBT champion within the organisation to drive the agenda forward
5. Investigate the potential for supplementing an LGBT champion role with a specific LGBT organising committee with clear roles and responsibilities, and lines of communication to cascade information up and down within the organisation
6. Consider producing staff briefings to cover key points of importance, such as the importance of confidentiality to young people, whether in school or other service provision
7. Source and facilitate access to staff training for both full time and part time workers. This could include general input on LGBT awareness and equality and diversity, as well as specific guidance on appropriate/neutral language and homophobic and transphobic bullying
8. Where possible, attempt to work in partnership with other schools and service providers to facilitate peer support and the sharing of good practice examples and other experiences. If formal networks are not in place, informal contacts can be used. This should not be restricted to only PSHE teachers. For organisations in Sheffield there is the new Sex and Relationships forum run by the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health
9. Investigate the potential for a named LGBT role within schools and organisations; this could be a designated support worker, or someone identified as a coordinator to act as a first point of contact to signpost and/or support young people. The importance of confidentiality should again be stressed here

10. Make use of appropriate external support agencies where these exist, but ensure this is not perceived as 'passing on' responsibility or duty of care; make sure there are adequate lines of communication in place first
11. Ensure access to appropriate resources to facilitate effective education and/or service delivery. Potential sources of support include GIRES, IDAHO, LGBT history month, and Stonewall (but there are also many others). Local authorities should consider signing up to the Stonewall Education Champions programme, as Sheffield has done. Schools, and where possible youth organisations, should work towards the goals within Stonewall's guidance, Sheffield's LGBT Charter and/or other local Charters
12. Heighten LGBT visibility on the premises. This could include relevant inclusive library books and posters advertising relevant local events or projects, as well as appropriate national organisations
13. Consult, at regular intervals, with all young people about their expressed needs. Within this, make sure that young people are aware of any support services/mechanisms in place within the organisation
14. Use the above consultation rounds to assess the desire or need for LGBT groups in schools, colleges and youth work settings. Where appropriate, these groups could facilitate networking across towns and cities, for example formalised relationships to Youth Councils or Young Advisors. This might involve named LGBT or equality representatives
15. Ensure access to specialist support services for LGBT young people; this might involve clear signposting and referral systems, or at times could involve service-level agreements. It also clearly entails the ongoing support and funding for existing services, and might necessitate the establishment of new services in areas where these are not currently in existence. Consideration needs to be given to the age range of services and the facilitation of peer support and peer education.

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## Further information

### **Guidance, materials and resources**

Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) See: [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk) and [www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk](http://www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk) Includes information about Anti-Bullying Week

Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT) See: [www.akt.org.uk](http://www.akt.org.uk) Supports LGBT 16-25 year olds made homeless or living in a hostile environment

Beatbullying See: [www.beatbullying.org](http://www.beatbullying.org)

Centre for HIV and Sexual Health (CHIV) See: [www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk](http://www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk) Includes information about the Sheffield Sex and Relationships network and a variety of training courses and other resources

Children and Young People's Empowerment Project (CHILYPEP) See: [www.chilypep.org.uk](http://www.chilypep.org.uk)

Children and Young People Now (2011) *Bullying youth work resources*. See: [www.cypnow.co.uk/news/1058004/bullying-youth-work-resources](http://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/1058004/bullying-youth-work-resources)

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DCSF (2009) *Guidance for schools on preventing and responding to sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying*. See: [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/pdf/SST%20Quick%20Guide.pdf](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/pdf/SST%20Quick%20Guide.pdf)

Department for Education (DfE) See: [www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/bullying/f0076899/preventing-and-tackling-bullying](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/bullying/f0076899/preventing-and-tackling-bullying) Includes current government anti-bullying guidance and various electronic links to other organisations

Education for all See: [www.stonewall.org.uk/education\\_for\\_all](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/education_for_all)

Educational Action Challenging Homophobia (EACH) See: <http://eachaction.org.uk>

Exceeding expectations See: [www.exceedingexpectations.org.uk](http://www.exceedingexpectations.org.uk)

Fruitbowl See: [www.sheffieldfruitbowl.org.uk](http://www.sheffieldfruitbowl.org.uk)

Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) See: [www.gires.org.uk](http://www.gires.org.uk) Includes guidance on transphobic bullying

Jennett, M. (2004) *Stand up for us: Challenging homophobia in schools*. See: [www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/Stand\\_up\\_for\\_us.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/Stand_up_for_us.pdf)

LGBT history month See: <http://lgbthistorymonth.org.uk>

Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF) See: [www.lgf.org.uk](http://www.lgf.org.uk) Produce *Enough is Enough! Safer Schools Pack*

NASUWT *Prejudice-related bullying*. See: [www.nasuw.org.uk/InformationandAdvice/Equalities/PrejudiceRelatedBullying/index.htm](http://www.nasuw.org.uk/InformationandAdvice/Equalities/PrejudiceRelatedBullying/index.htm)

Pink and Proud (Rotherham Healthy Schools LGB teaching resource) See: <https://public.rgfl.org/healthyschools/Resources%20Rotherham/Pink%20and%20Proud.pdf>

Rotherham LGB Youth Group can be found on Facebook

Schools Out See: [www.schools-out.org.uk](http://www.schools-out.org.uk)

Sex Education Forum (SEF) See: [www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources](http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources) Contains a variety of resources, including *Sexual orientation, sexual identities and homophobia in schools* (2005) factsheet

Sheen Amos Youth Trust See: [www.sayouthtrust.org.uk](http://www.sayouthtrust.org.uk) Includes information about the following services/projects: Fruitbowl, Off the Scene, Side by Side, Yambo

Sheffield LGBT Education Champions Charter For more details contact Sheffield City Council staff Chris Anderson on 0114 250 6730 or Bashir Khan on 0114 250 6886

Stonewall See: [www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_school/education\\_for\\_all/quick\\_links/education\\_resources](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/education_for_all/quick_links/education_resources) Includes a variety of education related resources and relevant research, including the *Stonewall Education Equality Index 2011: Preventing and tackling homophobic bullying in Britain's schools*

Tacade See: [www.tacklehomophobia.com](http://www.tacklehomophobia.com)

Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) See: [www.tht.org.uk/informationresources/professionals/resources-teachers/content.htm](http://www.tht.org.uk/informationresources/professionals/resources-teachers/content.htm) Includes the *Out in School* resource

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