



Getting it Right for LGBT Teachers

Community Discussion
Saturday 9th April, 2016



About LGBT Health and Wellbeing & LGBT Youth Scotland

Book online (FREE): bit.ly/1QSM2Lk
Venue: LGBT Youth Scotland
48 Commercial Street, EH6 6JD
Refreshments provided.
For more information, contact Jules:
E: jules@lgbthealth.org.uk
T: 0131 523 1104

[LGBT Health and Wellbeing](#) (LGBT Health) is a unique organisation in Scotland that aims to reduce the health inequalities experienced by LGBTQI people over the age of 16. [LGBT Youth Scotland](#) (LGBT Youth)

provides support to young LGBTQI people aged 13-25, through youth groups, counselling, information and advice.

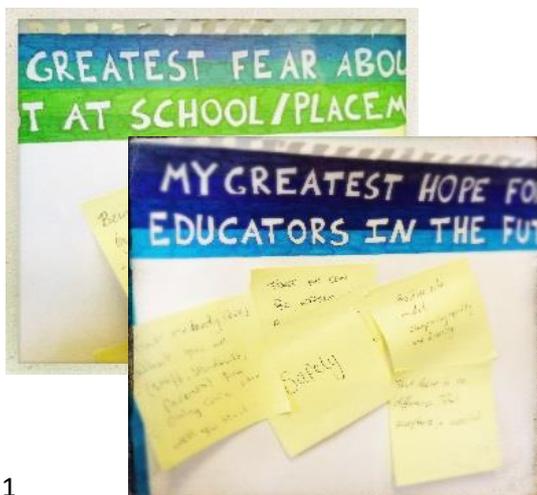
Background

In early 2016, Jules Stapleton Barnes from LGBT Health met with Graeme Ross at LGBT Youth Scotland, to explore the potential of working in partnership to deliver a supportive discussion and information event for LGBT teachers in Scotland. Through a series of useful discussions, the aims of such an event emerged: to provide LGBT teachers with the opportunity to have conversations with other LGBT teachers, get relevant support and share best practice. The partnership was strengthened by LGBT Youth's extensive contacts and engagement with the education sector and LGBT Health's proven track record in delivering regular community discussions on LGBT focused topics.

The event

The event was a relatively informal gathering of teachers who identify as LGBT that took the format of informal networking and group discussions, interspersed with brief inputs from national organisations. There were around 30 delegates present from across Scotland, including teachers from Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow and Fife. Notably there were teachers from both rural and city schools. Also joining us at the event were representatives from the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), Education Institute of Scotland (EIS), The National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and Scottish Workplace Networking for LGBT people (SWAN), to provide guidance and information about support services and initiatives aimed at improving the professional life of LGBT teachers in Scotland. The event was also supported by a team of LGBT Health 'Events Volunteers'.

The icebreaker and discussions



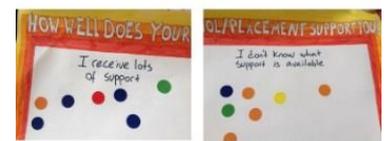
We began the event with an interactive task for all participants; to visit 4 posters around the room and contribute stickers and post-its to indicate their responses to these 4 questions:

- How 'out' are you at your school or placement?
- How well does your school or placement support you?
- What is your greatest fear about being 'out' at school/placement
- What are your hopes for LGBTQI teachers in an education setting?

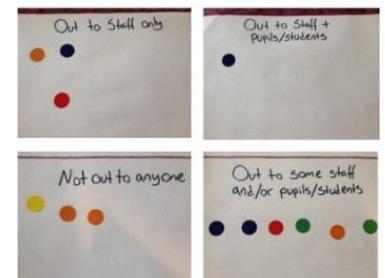
From the responses shared, both on the posters and in early conversations, we learned that not all participating teachers were experiencing the same support or exposure in regards to their LGBT identity at work. It was encouraging to see that many teachers felt supported by their employers, however there were a significant number who weren't sure what supports were actually available, for LGBT teachers in Scotland, and many who felt that clearer guidance should be made available.

We broke into two groups and the interactive icebreaker formed the basis of the facilitated discussions. As provided by our volunteer note-takers, we have compiled a summary of the discussions that unfolded, incorporating points of view of a diverse range of participants. It has been possible to categorise these into themes.

Support



Being 'out'



The discussions

Positive reflections

- General discussion initially highlighted a number of positive experiences teachers had faced in relation to feeling comfortable and “unchallenged” about their LGBT identity
 - One participant, a Deputy Head Teacher, shared how much of a ‘non-issue’ there coming out had been. They are open about their partner (also male) at school and have never experienced any negative reactions from staff or students. They also mentioned how specifically supportive other senior staff are and others commented on whether this had a positive impact on the rest of the school environment i.e. best practice being led “from the top”
 - Head Teachers & local authority Directors of Education have a big influence on equalities work and on the culture and priorities of their school(s)
- Some participants expressed that they felt “no need” to reveal details about their identity in their particular teaching setting. This was particularly relevant for supply teachers, whose teaching setting would change often
- One participant cited the young non-binary speaker Gaela Hanlon, at the SNP conference, as a positive influence to them

Greatest fears about being ‘out’ at school/placement

- Uncertainty about cultural expectations at a new school:
 - There is often an idea of assumed heteronormativity
 - There is no way to know someone else is LGBT which feels risky
 - There are issues around gender; assumptions and expectations of gender expression:
 - In regards to teaching in Glasgow, colleagues have been, “making assumptions that are absolutely gendered”. For example, she had been called ‘Sir’, and it “makes for an uncomfortable workplace.”
 - Another participant who identifies as non-binary, presents as more masculine or more feminine some days: “I was told by the deputy head I was dressing

too 'masculinely' and it was unprofessional." They were told to wear more heels and lipstick!

- Tend to see trans teachers in the news being asked to resign or being questioned about students' safety; trans teachers that participants know of are likely to pass or be made binary
- Religious schools:
 - One participant asked about policy for LGBT students at a new placement in a religious school and were told they 'don't have such students'. The senior staff clearly evaded the question
 - Catholic schools being allowed on religious grounds, to treat students/teachers differently, failing some groups. Those discussing believed that focus shouldn't be on schools' rights but on educating higher management; clearly LGBT teachers are not desired
 - Religious schools have a commitment and legal obligations to challenge bullying, but they should actively acknowledge LGBT presence though
- Parents not wanting LGBT teachers around their kids:
 - I worry that parents worry that LGBT teachers are teaching students "filth"
 - There was worry expressed about people's parents and their opinions
 - It was acknowledged that teachers can't be protected from parents telling their children negative things (so protection for teachers isn't just about unions and job security)
 - The 'recruitment' myth - that young people will be 'recruited' into identifying as LGBT
 - There was a story shared of a parent, head teacher and teacher intervention where 4 students came out as trans around same time. The parents were inclined to blame the teacher but the students responded with "It's got nothing to do with you (teacher), you just provided us with a safe space"

"I have genuine concern about whether I'm allowed to be this way around people's children..."
- teacher and participant



- Fear of being threatened/harassed by students:
 - There was a sense that teachers are expecting verbal abuse
 - Feeling like property might be damaged
 - It was suggested that more primary education teachers tend to be 'out' and that children pay little attention or cause less trouble. Parents' biases perhaps come through more as they age; discouraging LGBT teachers from going into secondary education

- The choice between getting on with life versus challenging the norm:
 - Coming out can be a risk especially during placements; fear of being stereotyped and fear that being open about your identity may limit your choices of employment
- Student teachers anticipate more discrimination from pupils' parents than from colleagues
- There are “appropriate levels of being out” as this can cause issues in terms of general safety at work
- Religious schools:
 - Real examples were given, of Religious schools (primarily Catholic schools) that have told their staff not to come-out in the workplace
 - There is a great need for further information provision and support in challenging these discriminations and to get help in responding to them
- Some schools are familiar with LGBTI issues but some are not - this leaves teachers feeling uncertain about how safe or supportive it is to be open about their LGBT identity
- “Being the LGBT Teacher can instantly make you the person in charge of all equality events and matters in the workplace, even if you know next to nothing about such things.”
- Fears were shared around threatening behaviour, verbal abuse, bullying and violence against LGBT Teachers, or the fear of such things happening leading to teachers choosing not to be open about their sexuality or gender identity
 - People are less likely to challenge their own fears and phobias if they are not able to come out

Greatest Hopes

- Wanting to be an effective role model without fear, championing equality and diversity
- That a teacher's LGBT identity is a non-issue and they are judged by their quality of teaching only
- That there is safety for all LGBT teachers
- That the fears for LGBT teachers are in fact, myths:
 - One participant is just waiting for their students to ask “Are you gay?” but doesn't think it's going to be an issue and tested the waters with a discussion about gay penguins, “It has to come from them”, he said
- Being able to explain things, to peers would be a great help – fears, facts, feelings, experiences etc....
- Senior Staff members who are on the LGBTI spectrum being ‘out’ can level the playing field
 - “It normalises things as the novelty wears off”
 - They act as role models for less experienced teachers (and students!)

Addressing identity *inside* the classroom

- One participant watched news programmes and would debrief with primary kids every day. One day a student asked “What does LGBT stand for?” and went on to say “being gay is wrong, right?” As he had permission from the head teacher to come out and was also leaving the school shortly, it was easy to address and start conversation around his identity and his relationship. He had assumed the geographical area he was teaching in wouldn't be very accepting, but was proven wrong
- Another participant recalled she had the chance to talk about her wife and her wife's daughter without needing to talk to the rector and without a backlash after
- For supply teachers, to come out or not to come out is an ongoing challenge
- Teachers NEED to be able to highlight to pupils key examples of prominent LGBT public figures and successful people in all fields – anything “from poets to scientists”

Addressing LGBT issues *outside* classroom

- There needs to be a PR campaign to raise awareness that LGBT teachers aren't dangerous
- There needs to be safe spaces provided for students to come out, share, learn
- Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) needs to happen much more frequently and be much better:
 - Non-LGBT teachers need to be informed and vocal about LGBT safer-sex education too
- There needs a safe workplace, viewing schools as employers with obligations:
 - Work with employers, local authorities, employees, unions and government
 - Some protective policies (against discrimination) are there but the implementation is missing
 - The group recognises that leadership on equalities from senior staff isn't the norm
 - Government likes positive outcomes and funding limited. The group suggest the need for EIS or local councils to start new initiatives and showcase efficiency and best practice across Scotland
 - LGBT+ groups in school and funding for training about LGBT issues is lacking too
 - Unless LGBT equalities issues are prioritised in improvement plans or relevant to a charter mark, teachers are having to give up their own time and resources or nothing gets done
 - Council-level influence on improvement plans can be due to pressure from young people and parents
- Training programmes for teachers:

“You're in a position of influence and parents recognise it. You need to know if something happens, your head teacher is on your side and will [try to] understand LGBT identities” - teacher and participant

- Need for consistent leadership and teacher training, infiltrate further education material
- Unions and effective support for LGBT teachers and LGBT equalities issues
 - Give LGBT teachers and TU reps knowledge about the Equalities Act and how to effectively represent teachers who are being discriminated against
 - The EIS have Equality representatives and one of the participants is currently undertaking the training. They provide training to representatives and members on the Equality Act and also host briefings from Thompsons Solicitors, the last briefing being on the Equality Act
 - A key role that trade unions should provide is to challenge things that go wrong in the workplace
 - The Unions could raise the profile of LGBT staff by sending a poster to each school to put in the staffroom about the existence and contribution of LGBT staff
 - Darren Waplington (NASUWT) fed back that at their last LGBT development day a major concern had been the language used in schools and that homophobic insults by pupils were often seen as acceptable and not challenged in the same way as for example a race based insult would be. One of the students advised that she had not heard any homophobic language on her placements but that she had undertaken research in this area and one of the main responses from teachers is that they need clear policies in what words are and aren't acceptable. Group members felt there was a role for educating members and workplaces in acceptable language relating to LGBT identities and issues.
- It was shared that honesty, integrity and authenticity are important when outing yourself – “not just by the book.”
- That equality practice is quite variable from school to school, and very dependent on the culture in each school:
 - If there were equalities standards being met, across the board, teachers could have more confidence in being open and trust in the system to know they are supported
 - Most teacher education now includes content on LGBT equality
- Defining what is good practice and bad practice need to be taught in regards to LGBT matters in schools - for both staff and pupils:
 - Too much “implicit and not enough explicit support” - further support and back-up is much needed
 - Teaching other staff about the damaging impact of biphobia/bi-erasure, transphobia, and non-binary discrimination – as well as homophobia needs to be tackled
- Saying you have a ‘partner’ depends on the situation and context of the discussion:
 - Participant story: A Principle Teacher complained to a member of teacher staff that their ‘coming out’ to a 15 year old student, and discussing same-sex relationships in the classroom, was inappropriate. The discussion under scrutiny followed a group discussion on “first boyfriends and first girlfriends”

A Principle Teacher complained to a member of teacher staff that their ‘coming out’ to a 15 year old student, and referring to a same-sex relationship in the classroom, was inappropriate.

to help inform and inspire acting roles the students were undertaking. In this case the students appreciated the conversations but the Principle Teacher deemed the topic “inappropriate”

- “Unsupportive Support Systems” is a major issue
 - None of the students who had attended union recruitment events had seen any references to LGBT issues on any of the unions’ stalls, and if they had, it might have inclined them towards that union
 - That student teachers (but also some experienced teachers) were not very aware of the range of equality work done by unions, and see them largely as a protection in case something ‘goes wrong’ at work, and a force to protect pay and pensions; they are keen to know more about this work and the values of the union, and this would promote more engagement
 - Unions could provide more simple and clear advice about what to do if you experience discrimination, and more training on these issues

“For every 10 secondary schools, there are on average 800 pupils in each school. That’s 8000 pupils in total, and 5% of the pupils in each of those schools are reckoned to be LGBT+ – so that means 400 pupils are potentially left vulnerable and un-catered for by the school authorities. For years even after Section 28, nobody thought that these issues should be addressed and they are still often left largely unconsidered today”
- Deputy Head Teacher and participant

Guest speaker presentations

Tom Hamilton, General Teaching Council for Scotland

Tom spoke about the GTCS approach to LGBT equality, mentioning in particular the standards, which include the same values around equality at all levels; the role of the GTCS in setting parameters for the content of teacher education programmes; and the role of COPAC (the Code of Professionalism and Conduct) in exploring ethical dilemmas for teachers. Tom Hamilton was of the view that “the standards give teachers an opportunity to be a catalyst to move education forward.” He was of the view that this should become a regular event.

“It was a really interesting afternoon. Some of what I heard was really reassuring but some points illustrated very strongly the journey that still needs to be completed.” - Tom Hamilton, GTCS

Darren Waplington, Policy Casework Official, The Teachers Union (NASUWT)

Darren spoke about their work on these issues. They hold an annual Equalities Conference in Scotland, and section specific national conferences including one for LGBT teachers. Each conference produces a conference declaration, including data on members’ experiences. At their 2015 LGBT teachers’ conference they found that 100% of the delegates had experienced workplace discrimination. All NASUWT Reps undertake equalities training. Their 2016 Equalities Conference will be on 18 June in Edinburgh.

Jenny Kemp, National Officer, Educational Institute of Scotland

Jenny Kemp attended this event to give an overview of the EIS's approach to LGBT equality, and to support the participation of members of the EIS LGBT Network in the event. Jenny spoke about the range of work underway at the EIS to support LGBT members, promote equality and challenge discrimination. She reported that EIS have an active LGBT Network, are holding a fringe meeting at their AGM on supporting trans learners and are currently doing research with members about their experiences of homophobia and transphobia. (Clare Halliday from Lochgelly High School attended on behalf of the LGBT Network. EIS members Pam Currie and Chris Jukes were also present as participants.)

“Thank you for a very interesting and enjoyable event on Saturday. Look forward to helping continue the momentum.”

- Robert Cole, SWAN

Robert Cole, Scottish Workplace and Networking

Robert Cole introduced people to Scottish Workplace Networking for LGBT People (SWAN) and spoke about its work to promote LGBT inclusion in workplaces. Robert also informed participating teachers that they were able to organise and host events specifically for teachers, so were keen to find out what these events might look like, and whether anybody from the event was keen to get involved. Several people shared their interest and contact details were later exchanged.

Evaluation

A formal opportunity was provided via feedback forms, to measure the impact and capture participant's feelings about the event. 26 forms were completed providing a rich resource from which to learn about outcomes but also participants ideas for future events. The feedback was overwhelming positive, with 100% of attendees marking that they 'enjoyed' or 'very much enjoyed' the event. Here are is a taster of the feedback, suggestions and what participants gained from the event in their own words:

“Hearing other's experiences as a student/teacher was really helpful and encouraging...”

“This was a great initiative – should be annual and well publicised in particular to rural schools all over Scotland.”

“How was this event advertised? Could local Council equality officers forward future meeting dates to their Head Teachers to pass on to all teachers? I happen to find out by chance”

“THE SCONES! No I'm just kidding, it was all EXCELLENT - the group conversations in particular. I really enjoyed meeting such a range of people from different sectors/organisations. Warm, friendly, informal environment.”

“Thank you for a very interesting and enjoyable event on Saturday. Look forward to helping continue the momentum.”

“Keen to help with events to bring people together. Excellent use of my time! Thanks.”

“Meeting other LGBT teachers and sharing experiences.

This event has helped my confidence to come out at school.”

Next steps

This report hopefully captures the positive experiences of the LGBT teaching professionals present, whilst providing a resource for organisations that are actively looking to improve their engagement with LGBT teachers in Scotland. A hopeful aim of the event was to highlight ways in which both LGBT and education organisations can provide effective support for LGBT adults in teaching professions in Scotland. Through discussions both formal and informal, the event has helped to bring to light the areas in which teachers are feeling comfortable and supported, but also the areas in which greater information provision and support could be provided. Here are some positive next steps that indicate this can be achieved:

- There was a strong interest from several individuals in becoming more involved in organising opportunities for LGBT teachers to meet, share and network in future. Robert Cole from SWAN made firm commitments to work with these interested parties to plan a follow up event.
- Making use of extensive professional and LGBTQI community networks, LGBT Health and LGBT Youth look forward to providing ongoing support to ensure we widely publicise any future opportunities arising from this pilot event.

LGBT Health and LGBT Youth would like to thank all the teachers and organisations who joined us and contributed to this unique venture.

Useful contacts

LGBT Youth Scotland

Graeme Ross, Education Capacity Building Officer, LGBT Youth Scotland
Citadel House, 40 Commercial Street, EH6 6JD
T: 0131 555 3940 E: graeme.ross@lgbtyouth.org.uk W: www.lgbtyouth.org.uk

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

Jules Stapleton Barnes, Community Development Worker, LGBT Health and Wellbeing
9 Howe Street, EH3 6TE
T: 0131 523 1104 E: jules@lgbthealth.org.uk W: www.lgbthealth.org.uk

NASUWT - The Teacher's Union

The Scotland Regional Centre serves NASUWT members working in Scotland. NASUWT is the fastest growing teacher trade union in Scotland and campaigns on range of issues affecting teachers' working lives.

Address: 35 Young Street North Lane, EH2 4JD

T: 0131 226 8480 E: rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

W: <http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/MemberSupport/ContactingNASUWT/RegionalNationalCentre/Scotland>

The Educational Institute of Scotland

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) is the largest teaching union in Scotland. Founded in 1847 the EIS is also the oldest teaching union in the world. The EIS currently has 80% of teachers as members.

Address: 46 Moray Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BH

T: (0)131 225 6244 E: enquiries@eis.org.uk

Twitter: @eisunion

W: <http://www.eis.org.uk/>

General Teaching Council for Scotland

GTCS carries out a wide range of statutory functions and initiatives to promote, support and develop the professional learning of teachers.

Address: Clerwood House, 96 Clermiston Road, EH12 6UT

T: 0131 314 6000 E: gtcs@gtcs.org.uk

Opening Hours:

Mon-Thu 09:00-16:45 and Fri 09:00-15:30

W: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/>

SWAN

Scotland-wide professional networking for LGBT people in every sector

Robert Cole, Co-founder and Treasurer | Scottish Workplace Networking for LGBT People (SWAN) Registered in Scotland as a Charity: SC045169. Registered office at LGBT Youth Scotland, 40 Commercial Street, Edinburgh, EH6 6JD

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