

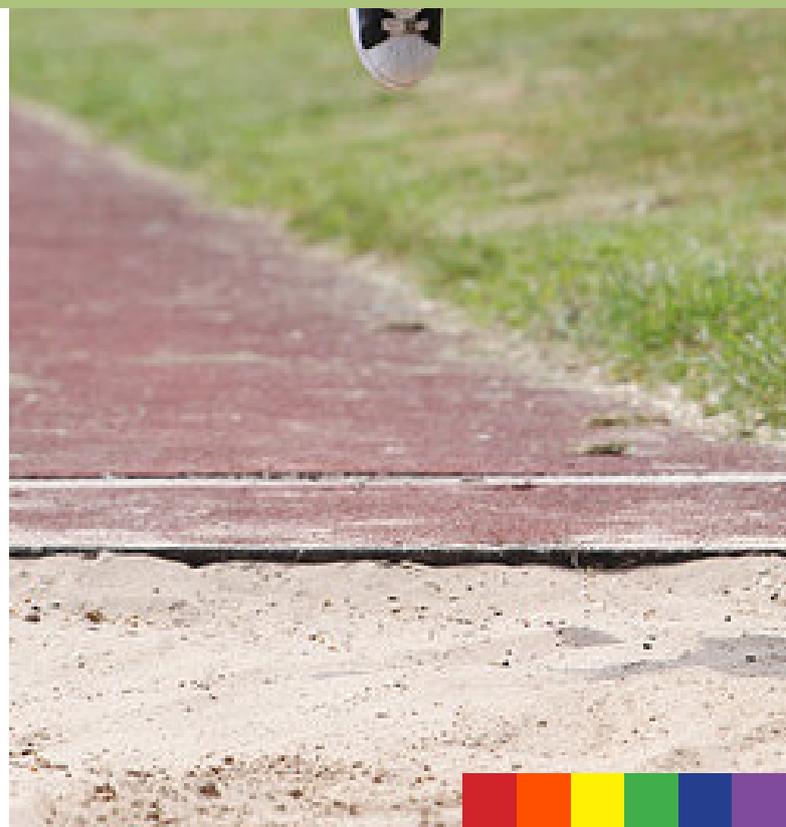
# INCLUDING LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE IN SPORT

## A Guide



Many LGBT people find organised sport to be intimidating and alienating, having experienced homophobia and transphobia within sport, particularly school sport, at an early age.

By:  
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With support from Pride Sports





# INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that between 6% and 8% of the UK's population is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Whilst the latest results from Sport England's Active people survey show lesbian, gay and bisexual people to be very active, it is unlikely that this activity takes place within affiliated community sports clubs. Whilst monitoring of gender identity has not yet been undertaken as part of the Active People Survey, it is highly likely that trans people remain some of the most excluded from sport and physical activity in the UK. Many LGBT people find organised sport to be intimidating and alienating, having experienced homophobia and transphobia within sport, particularly school sport, at an early age. Community sport therefore has some way to go in making itself accessible to LGBT people.

This Guidance provides some pointers from National Governing Bodies and other sport providers on how to make their sport more accessible to young LGBT people. It has been written following consultation with young LGBT people who access the services of LGBT Youth North West.

It provides information about the legislation as it affects young LGBT people in sport, takes a look at the experiences of LGBT young people in relation to sport, with a particular focus on school sport and then provides recommendations for engaging LGBT young people in sport and making sport a more inclusive and welcoming place.

# THE LEGISLATION

LGBT young people in sport are likely to experience issues that are currently covered by legislation as it relates to:

- Employment
- Vocational training and qualifications
- Provision of goods, facilities and services
- The practices of members clubs or associations
- Individual discrimination, bullying or harassment

The Equality Act 2010 provides a legislative framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all, which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society.

The legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate against actual or potential users of services on grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity and this applies not only to National Governing Bodies of Sport, but also to all sports clubs with more than 25 members.

[http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality\\_act\\_2010.aspx](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_act_2010.aspx)

For specific information on sports clubs:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/service-providers-guidance/what-equality-law-means-for-your-association-club-or-society/special-rules-for-sports-clubs/>

# DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBT PEOPLE IN SPORT

Attitudes towards LGBT people in UK society continue to change for the better. The inclusion and contribution of LGBT people is on the whole welcomed and celebrated across public life. In 2013, however, sport still seems to lag behind.

During the 2012 Olympic Games only 23 'out' gay participating athletes could be named by the LGBT press, and only one of these, Carl Hester, the equestrian athlete was from the UK. During the Paralympics only two gay athletes could be named, both of these were from the UK, Claire Harvey (sitting volleyball) and Lee Pearson (equestrian).

Of course the visibility of elite LGBT athletes in sport may be influenced by a number of issues, including potential negative reaction of sponsors, or a genuine desire by athletes to keep their personal lives out of the spotlight. If, however, we compare the percentage of out gay athletes participating in London 2012 with, say, the percentage of currently serving out lesbian and gay MPs, which is significantly higher, we must conclude that there is something specific about sport's environment, which makes it more difficult for people at the pinnacle of their careers to be open and public about their sexuality.

“At my school if you were gay it was assumed you were rubbish at football and if you were rubbish at football they assumed you were gay”

Recent research by Scotland's Equality Network highlights the wider problem across sport. The report on their findings 'Out for Sport' shows that of more than 1,700 respondents, 79% thought that there was a problem of homophobia in sport, whilst 62% had witnessed or experienced homophobia or transphobia in sport. Amongst trans respondents the numbers of those having experienced or witnessed homophobia or transphobia in sport rose to 80%.

Meanwhile, research undertaken by the National Union of Students also during 2012, which surveyed the opinions of 845 LGBT students, found that 46.8% of respondents experienced sport culture 'alienating or unwelcoming'.

This culture, which can put LGBT people off sport for life and which clearly allows homophobia and transphobia to persist, may be have at its heart some traditional views of gender.

Many of those working in the field believe that because sport has traditionally been very rigid in the way it sees men and women, and how it views what are appropriate 'male' and 'female' sports, that this can be problematic for LGBT people. Not only does this very segregated view of sport enforce certain kinds of behaviours and sports as being appropriate for our gender, it also stereotypes sportspeople who step outside of these ideas.

For example:

Gender	Sport	Stereotype
Male	Football	Heterosexual/straight
Female	Football	Lesbian/Gay
Male	Gymnastics	Gay
Female	Gymnastics	Heterosexual



As one gay man from LGBT Youth North West explains:

“At my school if you were gay it was assumed you were rubbish at football and if you were rubbish at football they assumed you were gay”

For transgender people, the binary gendered division of sport can also be problematic, as it forces them to participate in one category or another, when these categories might not fit how they feel about themselves. This may be especially true of young people who are exploring their gender identity. Not fitting into girls’/women’s or boys’/men’s sport can mean exclusion from sport altogether.

When stereotypes are acted upon, the actions and their consequences become discriminatory, intentionally or not. For sport, these stereotypes and the actions that have been taken as a consequence have had many consequences:

- Gay men have been made invisible in some traditionally male sports, such as football, and to a lesser extent, rugby and basketball.
- Women’s sport, particularly in relation to sports traditionally seen as male sport, is put under pressure to prove it is accessible for heterosexual as well as lesbian athletes
- Trans people, particularly trans women are seen as outsiders and cheats in sport, trying to gain an unfair physical advantage

These assumptions all lead to an environment where being heterosexual and cisgendered (experiencing a match between your assigned gender, your body and your personal identity) is viewed without question as ‘normal’, and valued more highly than being homosexual, bisexual and transgender.

“A focus on highly gendered team sports such as football and netball had alienated many young gay men and women.”



# YOUNG LGBT PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL SPORT

Homophobic and transphobic bullying is still an everyday part of school life for many young people in the UK. Stonewall’s School Report recently concluded that more than 55% of young LGB people had been directly bullied in school, whilst 99% of young people had had heard the term ‘gay’ used negatively e.g. ‘that’s so gay (bad)’, whilst 96% of young people had heard terms such as ‘poof’ and ‘lezza’ used.

Meanwhile, 41.9% of respondents to the NUS Out in Sport research said that they had been put off participating in sport by their experiences of sport in school. Through its own consultation with young LGBT people in partnership with Pride Sports, LGBT Youth North West discovered that a majority of young LGBT cite school sport as a focus for homophobic bullying.

“If you’re bad at maths, you’re just bad at maths. No one’s going to give you any grief for being gay in maths. But in PE its totally different and it’s not just that whole competitive thing with other teams where you’re trying to beat them into the ground. When you’re gay, its your own team trying to beat YOU into the ground”

In addition to negative experiences from peers, negative experience of changing facilities can also cause distress to young LGBT people. A majority of young people consulted in three focus groups during 2012 had been asked by PE staff to change in toilets and offices away from the communal changing rooms. In some cases this was because teachers were unsure of how to deal with young transgender people, but in the majority of cases young lesbian, gay and bisexual people felt that they were seen as either potential victims if they were boys, or sexual predators if they were girls. This experience confirms the findings of Sheffield Hallam University’s Study ‘Tackling Homophobia and Transphobia in Settings Supporting Young People’ (Formby, 2011) which found that LGBT young people in more than one school were being instructed to change for PE “in toilets and in other rooms located near to the regular changing facilities”.

LGBT Youth North West and Pride Sports also found that young LGBT people had experienced school sport negatively due to its limited offer. A focus on highly gendered team sports such as football and netball had alienated many young gay men and women.

“Boys at my school would say things like “you won’t be able to play football cos you’re a faggot” and “you won’t want to get your boots muddy” ...Then we went rock climbing and they were saying that I wanted to go last so nobody was watching me. So I just went up the rock face really quickly and they were all totally shocked that I was good at sport”



# ENGAGING LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE IN SPORT

One of the consequences of young people's negative experiences of school sport is that they never progress into community sport. Even if LGBT young people have not experienced homophobia or transphobia in a community sport setting, their negative experiences of sport within the school environment may mean that they expect to encounter homophobia and transphobia in all sport. Fears of homophobia and transphobia alone can present significant barriers to young people.

Additionally, a limited sports offer in school (which has also been experienced as homophobic and transphobic) can lead to a lack of awareness of the breadth of sport that is available in the community.

And yet, community sport led by National Governing Bodies clearly has an opportunity to grow participation through the engagement of young LGBT people and to create lifelong pathways for a community that has been often overlooked. To successfully achieve this, National Governing Bodies need to take appropriate and relevant steps, which don't need to be costly or time consuming, but may reap significant rewards

## Marketing Sport to LGBT Young People

Recent consultation with the LGBT community (Pride Sports 2012) has shown that LGBT people consider that much work needs to be done in marketing sport in a more targeted way to make it accessible to LGBT people.

Top suggestions have included:

- Greater investment in and links with LGBT sports groups (many of which may be unaffiliated)
- Advertising in a range of LGBT publications such as Gay Times, Attitude, Diva etc.
- Increasing visibility through participation in LGBT community events, such as local Pride Events.

Whilst these represent a good starting point for engaging the wider LGBT community, further consultation with young people has shown that engaging young people in sport has particular challenges:



“Young people at LGBT Youth North West were unable to name any of the [LGBT Sports] groups that existed locally or nationally.”

## LGBT Sports Groups

Although the UK boasts a thriving LGBT sports community, more than 120 sports groups throughout Britain, many of these are currently not accessed by young LGBT people.

Young people at LGBT Youth North West, when asked, were unable to name any of the groups that existed locally or nationally and believed that LGBT sports groups would be populated by very athletic adults who would be a. far beyond them in terms of ability b. older people with whom they would not want to socialise.

However, LGBT sports groups can provide a good community resource and pathway for first steps to participation and many of them would welcome younger participants, but may need support in achieving this.

## Advertising in LGBT Publications

Only a very small minority of young people at LGBT Youth North West access any kind of printed publication, and those who did, accessed a regional free magazine. Meanwhile, the majority of young people accessed most of their news and events information via social media. In line with national trends, most young people at LGBT Youth North West use Facebook and, to a lesser extent, Twitter on a daily basis.

Any marketing strategy therefore needs to take this into account and include a strategy for the use of social media platforms.

## Engaging LGBT Youth Groups

Although many LGBT youth organisations deliver physical activity opportunities as part of their offer to young people, there can still be a reticence to engage with sport. This may be because sport has not made itself accessible to LGBT youth provision, but also because many of the youth workers supporting young people have had homophobic or transphobic experiences of sport themselves.

In attempting to engage LGBT youth groups (of which there are 100s around Britain) it is worth remembering that you may be dealing with adults who have been excluded from sport and may need some additional encouragement and reassurance to form partnerships with NGBs and sports clubs

## Visibility at LGBT Events

Some NGBs have taken steps towards increased visibility at Pride events, such as Manchester Pride, London Pride and Brighton Pride, with a degree of success. Whilst this can help promote sport as a positive 'LGBT friendly' activity, it can provide little opportunity for actual engagement in sport.

The annual Pride Youth Games (PYG) is currently the UK's only LGBT youth multi-sport event, with young people trying a range of sports before taking part in a competition. The festival takes place in Manchester each year and is a partnership between LGBT Youth North West and Pride Sports. As many as 100 young people from LGBT youth groups throughout the UK have taken part in PYG in any one year, and new partners are always sought to support the event.

## Marketing Recommendations:

Contact your local LGBT youth group & offer to work with them. Offer 'taster sessions' or even a programme of sports activity for their young people (links to LGBT youth groups can be found here <http://www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk/directory>).

1. Make links with LGBT sports groups and find out if they are currently working with young LGBT people. Support them to engage with their local youth groups (coaches from LGBT sports groups may be interested in/able to support your work with young LGBT people).
2. In consultation with LGBT partners, look at ways to use social media to engage young people on an ongoing basis.
3. Use the LGBT press to profile your LGBT youth inclusion work to the wider LGBT community.
4. Offer taster events at Prides around the UK or get involved in Pride Youth Games (contact [strategic@lgbtynw.org.uk](mailto:strategic@lgbtynw.org.uk) or [lou@pridesports.org.uk](mailto:lou@pridesports.org.uk) to find out to get involved with PYG).



## Creating a Welcoming Environment

Whilst outreaching LGBT youth groups and sports clubs may be a great place to start engaging LGBT young people, it is essential to create inclusive environments across the whole of sport, so that pathways for all young people exist. Without these, sport risks losing some great talent. At the London 2012 Olympic Games ten out of the twenty-three out LGBT athletes won medals (43%), showing that athletes who feel safe and supported for who they are in their sporting careers, are able to achieve their goals.

The obvious starting place for LGBT inclusion will be robust and action-based equal opportunities policy and procedure. However, as sexual orientation and gender identity have traditionally taken a back seat to other protected characteristics in terms of the 'sport for all' ethos, it may be worth revisiting your equal opportunities framework and ensuring that LGBT inclusion is given the same priority as other areas. **Check that any action taken with regards to inclusion has included LGBT people.**

## Challenging language and behaviour

Sport has a duty to safeguard the young people who participate. Although figures do not currently exist for homophobic and transphobic bullying in sport, the evidence shows that sport has some way to go in making environments safe for young people. Whilst any homophobic and transphobic bullying should be dealt with using the usual safeguarding procedures, sport can help create inclusive and welcoming environments by ensuring that it takes a zero tolerance approach to homophobic and transphobic language and behaviour.

Children and young people may use the term 'gay' as a general term of derision without ever actually thinking about the effect of this on other young people. Language of this nature should always be challenged and all those involved in delivery of sport should feel confident to tell participants that using the term 'gay' to mean 'bad' or 'negative' will not be tolerated.

Because of the gender stereotypes surrounding sport and the gender stereotypes surrounding sexual orientation, homophobic and transphobic language may be expressed in a particular way in sport. For example, a male footballer may be told 'that's a gay/bent/queer pass' if he doesn't hit his target, a rugby player may be told he's 'acting like a poof' if he is hurt in a tackle and doesn't immediately get up, or girls participating in traditionally male sports may be name-called e.g. 'lez', 'dyke', 'butch'. Additionally, comments such as 'you're playing like a girl', whilst deeply offensive to girls and young women, may also be offensive to young gay men, who could perceive them as homophobic and young trans men, who could perceive them as transphobic.

Of course, these labels may be directed at young people who aren't LGBT as well as those who are and it is the responsibility of all sports leaders to ensure these words are challenged.

For more information please refer to the Child Protection and Sport Unit's Briefing on 'Homophobic Bullying in Youth Sport' [http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/cpsu/resources/briefings/homophobic\\_bullying\\_in\\_youth\\_sport\\_wdf81288.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/cpsu/resources/briefings/homophobic_bullying_in_youth_sport_wdf81288.pdf)

## Coaches

Young people at LGBT Youth North West thought that coaches were taught too much about the technical aspects of athlete development and not enough about diversity and inclusion, and yet it is essential, if sport is to increase its talent pool and continue to grow participation, that coaches who are able to meet the needs of a diverse athlete population are required at all stages of the athlete pathway. Often coaches can be hugely influential in young people's lives and acceptance can make the difference between a young person excelling in their chosen sport or dropping out at an early age.

Over the past ten years, the average age of 'coming out' as lesbian, gay and bisexual has lowered from nineteen to fifteen. This means that youth sport needs to engage with LGBT inclusion at all levels, in order to safeguard the young LGBT people in its care.

For more information about LGBT inclusion training for sport contact Lou Englefield, Director, Pride Sports [lou@pridesports.org.uk](mailto:lou@pridesports.org.uk)

“Children and young people may use the term 'gay' as a general term of derision without ever actually thinking about the effect of this.”



## Role Models & Visibility

One of the consequences of stereotyping is that LGBT people have become largely invisible in sport, and yet the importance of role models particularly for young athletes has been well documented.

It is not that young LGBT people need only lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender role models to aspire to. There may be many reasons young people are inspired by their favourite athlete and the majority of these reasons will have nothing to do with their sexual orientation. A lack of openly LGBT adults within sport, however, can contribute to the alienation of LGBT people. Young LGBT people may be left asking themselves 'Where are the other people like me?'

Whilst 'coming out' or being 'visible' may not be everyone's choice, there are undoubtedly LGBT adults working in sport who may be interested in acting as role models for young people and being visible within the sport. Making a general appeal for LGBT people to come forward will provide an opportunity for those who are confident in this role to get involved. Equally important is the role of the heterosexual/straight ally. Sports stars such as Ben Cohen who has launched the Stand Up Foundation and who allies himself with LGBT people in the campaign against homophobia in sport can make a huge impact. See also the RFL's Tackle It Campaign <http://www.therfl.co.uk/equitydiversity/tackle-it>

## Changing Facilities

Young lesbian, gay and bisexual people should never be asked to change separately from heterosexual young people. If young people complain about sharing changing facilities with young LGB people, they should be educated and their comments and attitude should be positively challenged.

Equally, young trans people should be supported to use the changing facilities and toilets of the gender in which they present and participate in sport. It is highly likely, however, that young trans people may experience anxieties around communal changing rooms. It is therefore important to talk to the young trans person and discuss their options. For example, are there single changing cubicles that can be accessed? It is essential in all discussions and negotiations to put the privacy and dignity of the young trans person first.

## Top Tips For Creating a Welcoming Environment

- Don't be afraid to raise the issue
- Audit existing provision across your club/organisation
- Access appropriate training & support
- Promote the positives to members (e.g. business case)
- Set a zero tolerance agenda for homophobia & transphobia
- Engage with stakeholders such as LGBT youth groups & community groups re. need
- Do not rely on one person to develop policy and practice, ensure whole club/organisation engagement & ownership
- Celebrate your achievements



## FURTHER READING

Guidance for Rugby League Clubs – Challenging Anti-Gay (Homophobic) Abuse & Behaviour  
[http://www.diversitychallenge.co.uk/files/resources/r\\_p\\_RFL\\_challenging\\_behaviour.pdf](http://www.diversitychallenge.co.uk/files/resources/r_p_RFL_challenging_behaviour.pdf)

Out In Sport – LGBT Students' Experiences of Sport  
<http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/NUS%20Cards/Out%20in%20Sport%20web.pdf>

Out For Sport – Tackling Homophobia & Transphobia in Sport  
<http://outforsport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Out-for-Sport-Report.pdf?>

CPSU Briefing – Homophobic Bullying in School Sport  
[http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/cpsu/resources/briefings/homophobic\\_bullying\\_in\\_youth\\_sport\\_wdf81288.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/cpsu/resources/briefings/homophobic_bullying_in_youth_sport_wdf81288.pdf)

RFL – Perceptions & Experiences of Rugby League, Young LGBT People  
<http://www.therfl.co.uk/~rflmedia/docs/LGBT-Research-perceptions-experiences.pdf>

Council of Europe – LGBT Inclusion in Sport  
[http://media.wix.com/ugd//10436c\\_66530c0d747c8b9f590ed3c2f07ed18f.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd//10436c_66530c0d747c8b9f590ed3c2f07ed18f.pdf)

