

Guidance for Managers: Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bi & Transgender Staff at Work

1. Introduction

At York St John University we highly appreciate the contributions that individuals with diverse identities, backgrounds and experiences make to our community. We are keen to create a welcoming environment for everyone, however we recognise that sexual orientation and gender identity can be a complex area.

This short guide will help you to develop a better understanding of the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity and provide guidance to meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bi and transgender (LGBT) colleagues in your role as a manager as well as to create an inclusive team, performing at its best.

2. Definitions

So we're clear what we are talking about: sexual orientation is an enduring sexual, emotional and/or romantic attraction towards others. Heterosexuals are attracted solely to people of a different binary gender, homosexuals are attracted to the same gender and Bis are attracted to more genders.

It's important to note that sex and gender are not one and the same. '**Sex**' refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define males, females, intersex people and others. 'Sex' can be fluid. 'Gender' on the other hand is far broader. Along with physical traits, '**gender**' is the interrelationship between those traits and a person's internal sense of self as man, woman, both or neither as well as their outward presentations and behaviours related to that perception.

Transgender or Trans is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or presentation does not conform to that typically associated with the gender which they were assigned at birth. This includes those who have non-binary, non-gender or gender-fluid identities. The term for the opposite of transgender is cisgender.

Heteronormative is the view that heterosexuality is the 'norm' and reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is somehow 'the only way'.

Cisnormative is the assumption that being cisgendered is the 'norm'.

3. Being Your Authentic Self at Work

Though sexual orientation and gender identity is a person's private matter, being open about it can be extremely beneficial to members of staff to simply feel accepted and included, no matter what.

The process of telling others about your sexual orientation or gender identity is often referred to as 'coming out'. Coming out is not necessarily a one-off event – people may have to come out many times during their lives.

LGBT staff should be in control about who they are out to and when.

Some staff may be comfortable for some colleagues to know but not others and therefore it is not appropriate to assume that others know about a colleague's sexual orientation or gender identity or that it's okay to share information related to it e.g. if a woman has a wife. However, allowing LGBT colleagues to be their authentic selves at work will not only allow for a happier team and higher work satisfaction but a better performance, too. Research by the LGBT charity Stonewall showed that staff who are out at work are overwhelmingly more satisfied at work and see their performance improve.

In addition, it is really important that none of our staff members have to hide their true selves and thereby experience any negative effects like loneliness, isolation, invisibility or even fear. LGBT colleagues who are not out at work are unlikely to complain about harassment for fear that through this complaint their sexual orientation or gender identity might become known.

Did you know? Deliberately outing a colleague or student against their will is considered harassment and may result in action being taken under our disciplinary procedures.

4. Supporting a Member of Your Team

When a person tells someone they are LGBT, it's an indication that they have confidence that they will respond appropriately, and that they trust them. It might also indicate that they require support. As a manager it is therefore a good opportunity to reinforce that they can be themselves and that being LGBT does not present a challenge or a problem.

In order to support a colleague coming out you should:

- Offer reassurance
- Tell them that you will respect their confidentiality
- Listen and be supportive
- Ask them whether they would like further information or guidance
- Let them know they can come and talk to you again or recommend someone else that they can speak to. There are some useful resources at the end of this guidance document.

As a manager there are development programmes available through the Staff Development team which will help to equip you with the appropriate skills in managing a diverse team, with diverse needs. In addition, there is some useful guidance available through the Stonewall website. Stonewall

5. Being Part of an Inclusive Team at Work

Banter can be fun, bringing people together and helping to build a team. It has benefits for stress-reduction and can raise the team's morale. However, as managers we have to make sure that nobody is feeling uncomfortable about or offended by this banter, which sometimes can be hard to tell. Jokes that promote negative stereotypes or use offensive language have to be taken seriously. If in doubt whether banter was harmless or harmful, seek feedback and views from the LGBT Staff Network or from our Equality and Diversity Adviser to get a better understanding of the individual's situation. Each person will have different feelings about banter and it is important that we intervene in a clear and timely manner where an offence has been made. Be inclusive, build mutual trust and understanding, and promote respect of each other.

At York St John University we say no to homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, hostility, harassment or prejudice and don't let any such behaviour go unrecognised or unchallenged. The mandatory equalities training includes a section about dealing with offensive banter and the responsibilities of everyone employed at York St John University.

6. Understanding the Experience of being LGBT

Being LGBT doesn't end with office hours so we have to be aware of the issues that LGBT colleagues can face in the wider society, in contact with students or at social gatherings.

Think about how:

- Work events and social gatherings for LGB people who might not be out where there is an expectation of being accompanied by a partner may cause stress.
- LGBT colleagues might feel burdened when they are out, for instance they may be assumed to be a role model for other colleagues or students and expected to function as pastoral caregivers.
- LGBT colleagues might experience pressure to conform with heteronormative and cisnormative expectations. LGBT colleagues may have to cope with bias and hostility. Being out can make a person feel more vulnerable to prejudice and the process of deciding whom to trust can take a lot of their energy and become a cause of major stress.
- Being transgender does not mean the person is or is not LGB. Do not make assumptions about the sexual orientation of a trans colleague.
- Lesbian or trans women may consider that being a woman is a barrier at work, and these women may be wary about coming out so as not to face double discrimination.
- Staff do not fall into just one protected group. Black and minority ethnic staff that are LGBT may find themselves pressurised to identify with either their ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity rather than simply being seen as themselves. Bear in mind how those individuals may face racism from other LGBT people or homophobia, biphobia or transphobia from people from the same cultural or ethnic background.
- Bis and trans people (in particular trans women) may find themselves struggling for acceptance with either lesbian or gay colleagues as well as their heterosexual team members.
- Some LGBT people experience a conflict between their sexual orientation or gender identity and their faith. A number of religions, or specific subsets of those religions, can be hostile towards non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities, which can alienate LGBT people of faith.

Whatever challenges the LGBT person you know might face, think about ways to support them and offer your help where possible.

Did you know? Our University policies are inclusive of same-sex partners, our pension schemes allow for pensions to be paid to same-sex partners where financial interdependence is shown and we grant LGBT staff with dependents the same rights as other employees.

Being a Supportive Manager:

- Do not assume that everyone or anyone is heterosexual and cisgender
- Create an inclusive atmosphere and encourage all staff to learn more about LGBT issues
- Make sure that social invitations use inclusive language, for example, use the word 'partner' rather than gendered terms (e.g. boy/girlfriend, wife/husband)
- Promote awareness of our LGBT Staff Network and our University policies
- Appreciate contributions by staff to promote LGBT equality
- Take prompt actions against homophobic, biphobic, transphobic or otherwise offensive banter, even if you are not aware that you have any LGBT staff.

More information about policies and support is available at our website. [Equality and Diversity](#)

7. Internal Resources/Advice

Human Resources Department

Email: humanresources@yorks.ac.uk Telephone: 01904 876619

Equality and Diversity Adviser: Marije Davidson

Email/IM: equalities@yorks.ac.uk Telephone: 01904 876481

Dignity and Respect Network

Please visit Intranet pages

LGBT Staff Network

Contact: Phill Gray, Chair

Email: lgbtstaff@yorks.ac.uk

LGBT Staff Network blog: [website](#)

8. External Resources/Advice

Stonewall (charity working for lesbian, gay, bi and trans equality)

[Website](#) Telephone: 08000 502020

Beaumont Society (self-help group for transgender people)

[Website](#) Telephone: 01582 412220 (information line)

Approved: 2014; reviewed June 2017

Contact: HR team at humanresources@yorks.ac.uk. Telephone 01904 876619