

Culture, Media and Sport Committee Homophobia in Sport Inquiry

Written evidence submitted by the Sport and Recreation Alliance April 2016

Key Points

- Gender stereotypes surrounding sexual orientation and homophobic languages are expressed in a particular way in sport
- School continues to be a defining life stage in the participation of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB¹) people in sport and physical activity
- Government, sport and recreation organisations and schools have a responsibility to the LGB community to ensure safe space for all life stages; this will ensure better health outcomes
- The Government's sport strategy prioritises support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGB&T) people in sport. This should provide a framework for stakeholders to take positive action as well as act as a lever for Government to share good practice and invest in impact evaluation
- Stakeholders should work together to build on the positive action that has been taken by sport and recreation organisations and schools to improve consistency in delivery of approaches and initiatives
- Continued focus should be placed on sports to ensure that facilities, stadiums and competitive sport venues offer safe spaces for supporters and their families
- Government should better support schools to tackle homophobia and create positive attitudes to LGB communities. Schools should also be encouraged to provide a wider sport offer at all ages to increase opportunities to engagement in team and individual activities

Sport and Recreation Alliance

1. The Sport and Recreation Alliance is the umbrella body for governing and representative bodies of sport and recreation in the UK. We represent 320 members covering a wide range of activities from football, rugby and cricket to rambling, mind games and dance.
2. We are responding to this inquiry as our members, the sport and recreation sector, have a key role to play in reducing homophobia in sport, the classroom and the community. Furthermore, the Alliance nurtures partnerships with the Sports Councils Equality Group (SCEG) and the National Governing Bodies (NGB) of sport Equality Leads Group.

Positive action in the sport and recreation sector

3. We welcome the commitment in the Government's sport strategy² that Sport England will place equal emphasis on support for LGB&T people in sport as it does for other characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010. We hope this will result in a clear action plan that will provide a framework for the sport and recreation sector to support everyone to be able to participate in a safe and positive way.

¹ We have focused our response on LBG people but have referred to LGB&T people if this has been specifically referenced in the work we are highlighting.

² HM Government (2015) *Sporting Future – A new strategy for an active nation*. Available via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sporting-future-a-new-strategy-for-an-active-nation>

4. A range of NGBs have taken positive action to promote participation by LGB people. Many sign up to the Equality Standard for Sport³, a framework designed to promote positive action across the protected characteristics. Evidence and positive action had depended on the investment and capacity of the NGB.
5. NGBs have produced guidance and training, targeted at all levels of the organisation. The guidance provides useful strategies to challenging homophobia, from the `causal` use of the term `gay` to refer to anything negative to homophobic abuse directed at individuals in both the club setting as well as match days.⁴

Tackle It

The Rugby Football League (RFL) launched tackle it in 2010 and have further refined its guidance and training for clubs. The Tackle It! Programme has three key aims: To tackle discrimination, bullying or abuse in both club setting and match day environment, to increase reporting of unacceptable language and to celebrate the diversity within Rugby League.

The RFL provided support including text line services at stands, marketing (including posters, DVDs and educational resources), a code of conduct and other guidance. RFL where the first NGB to launch guidance resource *Guidance for Rugby League Clubs – Challenging Anti Gay (homophobic) Abuse and Behaviour*, this was met with widespread acclaim.

RFL won Stonewall's Sports Award of the Year 2012.

6. The UK boasts a thriving LGB sports community with more than 120 different amateur sports clubs. Some have fostered great relationships with their NGBs, but this is inconsistent across the sector. Proactive approaches from NGBs have seen examples of collaboration with Equity Partners such as Stonewall, Pride Sports and LGB community clubs. Resources have also been produced; LGBT Youth North West worked with Pride Sports to publish a guide on how to include LGBT young people into sport.⁵
7. All involved in sport and recreation, including the media, can contribute to promoting an inclusive environment through supporting positive role models. For example, the rugby community supported Keegan Hirst, the first professional British player to come out as gay last year, with a `so what?` approach which helps to combat stigma around sexuality.
8. In 2011, the Government Office for Equalities launched `Tackling Homophobia and Transphobia in Sport – The Charter for Action`. Founding signatories included some NGBs showing a joint commitment to action in this area. However, this Charter became a missed opportunity as momentum lapsed and there has been no clear evaluation of its impact.
9. One of the Charter's commitments is to ensure that sport is a `welcome place for everyone`. Continued focus should be placed on ensuring that sport and recreation facilities, stadiums and competitive venues offer safe spaces for supporters and their families.

³ For more information on the Equality Standard for Sport visit <http://equalityinsport.org/>

⁴ The RFL tackle it programme includes the resource *Guidance for Rugby League Clubs – Challenging Anti Gay (homophobic) Abuse and Behaviour* available via http://www.caaws-homophobiainsport.ca/e/resources_others/documents/Guidance_for_Rugby_League_Clubs_Challenging_Homophobic_Abuse_&_Behaviour.pdf

⁵ *Including LGBT Young People in sport – A Guide* is available via <http://rflmedia.therfl.co.uk/docs/Including%20LGBT%20young%20people%20in%20sport.pdf>

10. We would encourage Government to revisit the Charter and explore with the sport and recreation sector how best to maximise its impact. The Culture, Media and Sport (CMS) Committee may also support this activity.

The impact of homophobia in sport on LGB people in schools

11. Research studies demonstrate that homophobia, and the perceptions of unsafe environments this creates, is the primary barrier for LGB people participating in sport. Schools continue to be a defining life stage in participation for LGB people in sport with school environments, specifically sport clubs and Physical Education (PE), having the biggest impact.
12. Research found that 77% of participants have witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport, with the most likely location of homophobia being in spectator stands followed by school PE classes. Furthermore, at least 80% of LGB people have heard verbal slurs such as “faggot” or “dyke”.⁶
13. Other research found that 55% of young LGB people have been directly bullied in schools while 99% of young people, LGB and straight, had heard the term ‘gay’ used negatively.⁷ Language, especially when not challenged by a teacher/coach continues to be evidenced as a key problem in both LGB adults and young people.
14. Research⁸ has found that:
 - LGB students more likely to participate in an individual sport or fitness activity (59.1%) than a team sport (34.6%)
 - student experiences in sport demonstrate that 46.8% of non-participants find the culture of sport alienating or unwelcoming
 - 41.9% also reported a negative experience at school

Positive action in schools, colleges and universities

15. Research has found that most LGB people have heard or been subject to homophobia, specifically in sporting contexts such as PE or clubs, at schools. However, positive action is taking place at both national and regional levels including:
 - Schools providing anti-discrimination training to all staff members detailing significant impact homophobia can have on young people
 - General talks from professional sports people in schools on homophobia to inspire confidence
 - Campaigns to create universal anti bullying resources
 - Research and reports detailing the need for teachers to receive training relevant to challenging homophobia
 - Using Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education to provide interventions on this issue using sport as examples

⁶ Out On the Fields report, data taken from the UK responses. The largest and first international study of nearly 9500 gay % straight people by 7 international academics. Full report and comparable data available via: <http://www.outonthefields.com/infographic-uk.html>

⁷ The School Report – Stonewall available via: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/The_School_Report_2012_.pdf

⁸ Out in Sport – LGBT Students’ Experiences of Sport available via: http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Final%20Out%20in%20Sport_NEW_web.pdf

Leave It Out – Save the Children

Launched in 2008, this guidance is still seen as best practice to help changes attitudes and behaviours within the school community. In partnership with LGBT Youth, Rainbow Project and Youthnet, the guidance builds on existing 'universal' bullying support resources. It encourages Governors, principals, teachers, support staff and pupils to take collective responsibility for much needed changes in attitudes and behaviours in school.

16. Universities and colleges have seen positive action at the tertiary education level. Organisations such as British Universities and College Sport (BUCS) and Student Unions have taken active roles in supporting LGB students to participate in sport.

Take a Stand – British Universities & Colleges Sport

In December 2015, British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS) launched the #TakeAStand campaign aimed to make the university sport experience as inclusive and accessible as possible. As part of the campaign, BUCS identified 8 themes of behaviour to tackle, with one of these being LGBTphobia.

BUCS has since developed a guidance document to support member institutions in eliminating such discrimination and are also collating universities' existing policy and training for student leaders to showcase how institutions are working towards making university sport increasingly inclusive. Moving forward BUCS will be running weeks of action and working with national partners including Stonewall and Pride Sports to support member universities in tackling discrimination towards LGBT+ students.

17. Government can play a leadership role in supporting an inclusive school environment by:
- Supporting schools to tackle homophobia and create positive attitudes to LGB communities through curriculum and PSHE
 - Producing guidance on how to challenge homophobic language in PE and sport settings
 - Encouraging schools to provide a wider sport offering at all ages reducing the focus on highly gendered team sports

Sharing best practice and evaluation

18. There is a lot of positive action being taken across sport and recreation to tackle homophobia. Government should contribute to the sharing of best practice and celebrating success at both national and regional levels. The CMS Committee could explore how it could also support this.
19. While there is best practice guidance produced by a number of educational and third sector partners, there are limited resources that evidence the impact of its implementation. This may be why there is limited change in the response from LGB people relating to experiences in schools. Government should invest in the evaluation of initiatives to demonstrate positive impact and offer guidance to the sport and recreation sector on how to evaluate and monitor progress in this area.
20. Thank you for the opportunity to submit evidence to this timely, important inquiry. We would be happy to provide further detail if helpful.