Effective Leadership on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues in Further Education: Overcoming barriers to implementing sexuality, diversity and equality.

Dr Mark Vicars

“On my course, my lecturer does some stuff on gay people in the arts and it is really interesting. I feel included and we have some really interesting discussions. Other students always come up and ask me questions about being gay and they have been really supportive.”

Student
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Executive Summary

This report outlines a research study designed to examine effective leadership on Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) issues in the Learning and Skills Sector. The project identified the following key obstacles:

- Attitudinal barriers and personal discomfort of staff around LGB issues.
- Uncertainties about how to develop frameworks and guidelines that address LGB.
- Not recording or keeping data on homophobic incidents or having adequate reporting mechanisms.
- Perceptions that the ethos and culture of an institution cannot be changed.
- Not developing, embedding and enforcing policy and training.

The research found that effective leadership on LGB issues would include:

- SMT supporting critical engagement with issues surrounding sexuality and promoting a whole institution approach to challenging homophobic behaviour.
- Embedding sexual diversity in the development and delivery of all teaching and learning materials.
- Developing procedures to effectively deal with homophobic incidents.
- Consulting with external agencies on how to develop policy.
- Having a nominated hate crimes representative within the institution.

The impact and benefits in challenging homophobia were identified as:

- Making visible to the student body that the institution does not and will not accept homophobic language or behaviour.
- Being known that the institution values and celebrates sexuality equality and diversity.
- Developing expertise in training and resources that can be shared as models of good practice within the learning and skills sector.
Introduction

The purpose of the research was to investigate effective leadership in implementing sexuality diversity and equality in the learning and skills sector. It sought to examine how sexuality-related diversity and inclusion was being addressed by senior and middle management. Over a period of six months, in-depth semi structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with senior management, with curriculum leaders and lecturers and with a small, self selecting sample of lesbian, gay and bisexual students/ staff within a FE institution in the Yorkshire and Humber region. The institution offers a range of vocational and academic programmes, the number of 16-18 year old students on full time courses is recorded at 2,659 and, with over 1,200 staff, the institution is the third largest employer in the region.

In the interviews, the informants were asked to consider those issues that they felt most affect and impact upon lesbian, gay, bisexual learners in college settings. They were invited to reflect upon their professional and personal experiences when encountering and addressing homophobic and heteronormative practices within their day-to-day college life and learning environments. In the focus group discussions the informants were provided with scenarios, drawn from actual incidents that had occurred both in classroom settings and within the wider college environment. The informants were invited to discuss these scenarios and discuss what effective leadership on sexuality-related diversity and inclusion might be in relation to the following:

(i) The implementation of sexuality diversity policies;
(ii) The monitoring of sexuality diversity policies in delivery;
(iii) The impact of institutional ethos on sexuality diversity policies;
(iv) The development of models for good practice.

The data that emerged were embedded and embodied in narratives of personal and professional experience. Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions core themes emerged and these were qualitatively considered by the informants. The interviews with senior management and curriculum leaders focused on the development of policies, reporting mechanisms and training that could effectively intervene in and counter homophobic practices. The focus group discussions with curriculum leaders, lecturers and the interviews with students were orientated around experiences of discrimination and harassment on the basis of sexuality. The informants spoke about how they had responded to these incidents; to what extent policies or reporting measures had been in place; whether these had been effective and to what extent they considered the institution to be ‘LGB friendly’.
The intended outcomes of the project were to:

(v) Examine the process of developing awareness of sexuality-related diversity and inclusion within the learning and skills sector;

(vi) Consider how effective leadership on sexuality-related diversity and inclusion is best achieved;

(vii) Share good practice in the development of frameworks and guidelines that address sexuality-related diversity and inclusion in the learning and skills sector;

(viii) Share effective institutional practices when supporting LGB individuals who have been the target of prejudice and harassment in the learning environment.
Research Framework

This research is framed by policy changes (The Equality Act 2006) and the putting in place of guidance, for Primary and Secondary phases of education, that address the practices of heteronormativity and homophobia within educational domains (Circular 10/99 Social Inclusion: Pupil Support DfES, 1999; Every Child Matters Framework, DfEE, 2003; Stand up for us’, DfEE, 2004, Education for All Campaign, Stonewall 2005; Homophobic Bullying, DCSF, 2007).

Research that has focused on sexuality-related diversity, equality and inclusion in educational domains has indicated how verbal abuse, isolation, physical assault, being ostracized and pressure to conform is part of the everyday educational experiences of individuals who are, or are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual (Rivers, 2001; Rivers, & Duncan, 2002; Warwick, Chase & Aggeleton, 2004; Ellis & High, 2004; DCFS, 2007). Having the experience of being stigmatised and of feeling isolated in educational domains can have costly consequences. Experiencing homophobia, within schools and colleges, can result in higher levels of absenteeism/truancy (Rivers, 2000; Martino,& Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Rasmussen, 2006). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual young people who have been bullied, are more likely prematurely and permanently to leave education with few or no qualifications and are less likely than their peers to enter further or higher education (Charter, 2000).

In many ways post 16 education can offer a fresh start. College can become a place to get back on track in terms of learning and acquiring qualifications. It has been suggested that:

> “Educational and social interventions aimed at addressing social exclusion may lead to changes in individual self-concept, increased well-being and more developed social networks.”

(Bird & Akerman, 2005: 24)

Therefore, effective leadership in the learning and skills sector could be instrumental in overcoming dispositional, structural and institutional homophobia and heteronormative practices. FE colleges could become key players in delivering the social inclusion agenda and productively intervene in the social exclusion of LGB youth in educational domains (Herr, 1997; DfEE, 1999; Quinlivan, & Town, 1999; Mullen, 1999; Rivers, 2000, 2001; Adams, Cox and Dunstan, 2004; Vicars, 2007; Vicars, 2008 (forthcoming).

Until recently there has been a paucity of literature that has addressed the experiences of LGB learners in post-16 settings. However, the CEL (2006) report Equality and Sexual Orientation: The leadership challenge for further education, indicated how harassment and bullying on the basis of sexual orientation is commonplace within FE colleges. The report highlighted how a considerable level of bullying and harassment was being perpetrated on the grounds of sexual orientation
and suggested that effective leadership and embedded policy can make a positive impact and produce positive experiences for LGB learners within FE environments. Wright and Cullen (2001) examined the changes in college students’ attitudes after they had been exposed to information about homosexuality and had actual interactions with LGB individuals. They suggested reasons for the change in attitudes, from negative to positive, were the dispelling of myths surrounding homosexuality and that there was a correlation between having low levels of knowledge of sexual information and high levels of homophobia.

Addressing sexuality-related diversity and inclusion in the learning and skills sector, requires leaders in FE colleges to challenge institutional barriers and address exclusionary practices and pedagogies. The task that has to be achieved is to create an environment which is aware of LGB learners’ needs and to create a culture, in which staff and students ensure that discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is unacceptable and is challenged. The main questions that the research sought to address were:

- What are the obstacles for effective leadership in addressing LGB issues in the Learning and Skills Sector?
- What does effective leadership in creating and implementing frameworks and guidelines on sexual orientation issues mean in practice?
- How can leaders in the Learning and Skills Sector successfully get all staff to support sexuality diversity equality as being an integral part of an institutional ethos?
- What has been the impact and benefits, in challenging heterosexism and homophobia in educational cultures, curricula, learning and teaching for Post 16 institutions?
- What resources would have to be developed to meet training needs around LGB issues in the FE sector?
- What recommendations for effective leadership on sexuality diversity can be made based on practice based evidence?

Educational domains are not neutral public spaces but sites of tacit instruction in the possibilities and limitations of what identities are and what they do. Lesbian, gay, bisexual students and staff physically inhabit the public spaces of educational institutions and yet they have historically been expected to leave their bodies and their experiences outside those institutional doors. If the presumption of heterosexuality is routinely embedded in the explicit and hidden curriculum and in pedagogies surrounding childhood, adolescence and schooling, then it makes it almost impossible for young lesbian, gay or bisexual students to be anything other. Despite legislative frameworks being put in place attitudinal barriers continue to reinforce stigmatisation around LGB individuals within educational discourses. The 14–19 Education and Skills White Paper (DfES, 2005) states:
“We will re-engage those who currently drop out. Our final key task is to tackle disengagement... By tackling the personal problems of young people through the ‘Every Child Matters’ programme, we will progressively lower the barriers to their achievement. And we will seek to make sure that we develop options for the most disengaged young people which gradually draw them back into learning, with support... We will make sure that the organisational arrangements follow the needs of learners and reflect their diversity.”

However, when educational domains operate as heteronormalising institutions, LGB and heterosexual youth who do not fit gender stereotypes, habitually become victims of verbal and physical bullying (Herek, 1987; Herr, 1997; Mac An Ghaill, 1994). Unsurprisingly, students, both gay and straight, who endured abuse on a daily basis, reported how it affected their educational performance and general well-being and spoke of how verbal harassment was not harmless behaviour and how being called ‘queer’ or ‘being perceived to ‘act gay’ had a detrimental affect on their learning and self esteem (Vicars, 2006). Pejorative utterances, irrespective of context, remain powerful tools in the arsenal of heteronormative cultural practices in that they continue to constitute what is and is not considered as ‘normal’ within classrooms and corridors. ‘Poofter’, ‘queer’, ‘homo’, ‘lezzy’ are highly meaningful and their meanings are precisely mapped in peer culture (Rofes 1995, p.82). Often the seriousness of homophobic language is not fully appreciated or tackled by staff but when tutors and senior management ignore or dismiss the seriousness of pejorative remarks they create an environment that LGB students are powerless to change and the message is sent that harassment is an inevitable consequence of identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Implementing change that addresses homophobic language and heteronormative practices will only have a direct impact if it is seen to be enforced.

Heteronormativity has been used to describe an ideological system that denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any non heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community (Warner 1993). It is rooted in social values and institutions and is analogous to sexism and racism. It operates through a dual process of invisibility and attack and if educational communities fail to address heteronormative practices then those on the receiving end of homophobic bullying are at greater risk of suicide, depression, dysfunctional peer group and family relationships, alcohol and drug use (Kourany 1987; D’Augelli & Hershberger 1993; Epstein, 1994; Epstein & Johnston, 1995; Hershberger and D’Augelli 1995; HRW 2001; D’Augelli 2002).
Research Methods

Atkinson (2004) has remarked how there is a ‘deafening silence on sexualities in education’ (ibid, pp. 55–56) as to some extent doing research that focuses on homosexuality in educational domains can be a sensitive and methodologically problematic task particularly in terms of recruitment and access (Squirrel, 1989). However, having worked for five years as an openly gay lecturer at the institution in which the research was conducted, and having been involved in LGB awareness raising activities, I was able to utilise my ‘insider’ status (Sikes & Potts, 2008) to overcome the potentially challenging issues of informant access and participation. At the time the research was being conducted, the institution was also involved in establishing a LGBT community forum (the T here refers to transgender issues – see page 10). I was a member of this forum and senior management had expressed an interest and willingness to facilitate the forum and to be involved in the research project.

Throughout the interviews and focus group discussions, the informants were asked to think about and reflect on how effective leadership in the Learning and Skills Sector could be instrumental in overcoming dispositional, structural and institutional homophobia and heteronormative practices. I was, at the outset, interested in the informant’s stories of particular experience. It has been suggested that:

“A story relates what people do in such a way that we are invited to see the point of the action. Stories are not about separate actions but about practices. A story shows us what is at stake in the practice.”

(Widdershoven & Smits, 1996, p.27)

Therefore, my aim, in the interviews and focus group discussions was to elicit detailed narratives in which the informants would reflect upon:

- Pedagogy and curricula
- Institutional policies and practices
- Cultural understandings
- Exclusionary discourses and practices
Interviews with Senior Management

Four in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected members of the SMT comprising the Principal, Vice Principal (with responsibility for teaching and learning), the Human Resources Director, and the Diversity and Equality Officers. The aim of these interviews was to examine the development of strategies in the development of policy and its impact on improving practice. The informants were asked, how, as leaders, they have sought to address formations of – and resistance to – heterosexism and homophobia in curricula, learning, teaching and assessment in their institution in their professional roles; how current educational policy and legislation as it relates to the education of lesbian, gay and transgender students had been implemented within the institution; how they had met the leadership challenge in addressing LGB equality in their institution and what recommendations, on the basis of experience, they can make for developing a model for good practice. The topics discussed were qualitatively considered and the issues that emerged informed the focus group discussions with curriculum leaders and lecturers and the self selecting sample of lesbian, gay and bisexual students. The interviews were transcribed and the finished narratives were written up for thematic analysis.

Focus Groups

Due to lack of take-up and teaching commitments only two focus group interviews were conducted with curriculum leaders and lecturers from a range of academic and vocational departments in the institution. Scenarios were used to generate discussion and the issues raised were qualitatively considered. The aim of the sessions was to investigate professionals’ views of the key strategies necessary to provide provision for LGB equality and diversity in post-16 institutions. The informants in the focus group discussions considered the extent of involvement required by senior management in developing effective strategies and policies; the efficacy of leadership in the implementation of strategies and policies and the potential impact on practice from the perspective of individuals who would have to implement change in the classroom.

The informants were asked how, as middle managers and as lecturers, they have sought to address formations of – and resistance to - heterosexism, homophobia in curricula, learning, and teaching in their classroom practices and in their day-to day relationships with colleagues. They were asked about current policy and legislation as it relates to the educational inclusion and welfare of LGB students. They were asked to talk about their experiences of supporting LGB students within the institution and how they have dealt with homophobic incidents in their curriculum areas. They were also asked to consider how sexuality equality diversity has been implemented within the institution in terms of policy change and how they have been supported with training. They were asked to comment on how leadership within the institution has met the challenge in addressing LGB equality and what recommendations, on the basis of their experience, they can make for developing a model for good practice. The issues that emerged informed the focused group discussions with the self selecting sample of LGB students and staff. The interviews were transcribed and the finished narratives were written up for thematic analysis.
**Interviews with LGB Individuals**

There continues to remain a paucity of research conducted within educational domains on lesbian, gay or bisexual issues that engage with the perspectives and experiences of LGB identified learners (Donelson & Rogers, 2004). Recruitment proved to be an issue and three semi-structured, life history orientated interviews were conducted with a self selecting sample of LGB identified students and one member of staff, across a range of vocational and academic programmes. I consider that my positioning, as an openly gay man, facilitated an ‘interpersonal bridge’ (Kaufman, 1974) that enabled the informants to speak candidly about their experiences of what it was like to be lesbian, gay or bisexual within the institution. The interviews were transcribed and the finished narratives were written up for thematic analysis.
Research Findings

The focus of this research was specifically on LGB issues. However, some interviewees also included transgender issues in their responses. This is illustrated in the empirical quotations that appear in the following pages. It is also reflected in the College’s formal concern with LGBT. More specifically, whilst managers in research interviews tended to focus on LGB, those in less senior positions were more likely to include transgender in their responses. Within the literature it is increasingly recognised that transgender issues are distinct questions and need to be addressed as separate concerns. Some scholars are critical of processes that subsume transgender within perspectives that actually prioritise LGB concerns. Accordingly, whilst this project focussed on LGB, the empirical section of this report also includes references to transgender issues.

Key obstacles preventing effective leadership in addressing LGBT issues

Raising awareness and challenging personal discomfort was repeatedly referenced as being a major obstacle when addressing LGB issues.

“I think that LGB issues have a currency of discomfort. It is probably a heavy generalisation but familiarity of the average member of the general public on LGB issues is limited to certain experiences of watching the television and certain sitcoms or if they have a close friend or member of the family who has come out. It is an area of discomfort for people at all levels in organisations. It is not just an issue for senior management.”

Senior Manager

“There is not a formulated plan at the moment for dealing with individuals in middle management that are homophobic. You have a choice whether you allow something like that to happen, as an individual, as a member of staff and also as a manager. The question then arises who is the one who is challenging? Who is the challenger? Would I be able to challenge another colleague? The problem is knowing how to effectively address a homophobic colleague.”

Senior Manager
Uncertainty about how to address LGB issues and caution about doing it wrong were also perceived to be obstacles.

“There is a natural degree of caution about activities that you might come up with or a strategy that you might develop as you don’t want to get it wrong. To a large extent it is uncharted territory. There are considerations to be made in terms of catering for learners. Some learners will want to be open and out about their sexuality and some people will not. It is about catering for those different outlooks. It is about planning very carefully to reach as many people as possible. It is imperative we plan carefully to do something which is better than nothing which has happened in many organisations. My only real concern is that if we encourage people to come out that they are in the right environment to come out, and everybody is going to deal with it in the appropriate manner. We need to ensure that staff are fully briefed and encouraged to celebrate everybody’s differences.”

Middle Manager

It was felt by some in senior management, that LGB equality could be embedded in a general diversity approach.

“I think the principle of leadership on LGB issues is no different from leadership in other senses, in that you need to have some clarity of purpose, be aware of context and have some vision of what you want to do.”

Senior Manager

However, it was also felt that this may be misconceived and a more effective approach would be to develop a specific LGB strand.

“We don’t currently have a strategy that is specifically around LGB. We have a strategy around equal opportunities but I think we need to break it down further so that we have a very clear and distinct strategy. We have an inconsistency around our practice that is not acceptable. We wouldn’t accept it for course files so why are we accepting it for LGB?”

Senior Manager

Developing frameworks and guidelines that enable effective challenges of homophobic personnel were perceived to be important.

“You can put all the frameworks in place but what matters is what people believe and that they are challenged in their beliefs. How do you do that? We have got frameworks about discrimination, we have got frameworks for complaints, we have got frameworks about grievances. What I am not sure about is where, we, as managers, would be on the scale in terms of providing education and supporting individuals that have experienced harassment. What would that involve? Where do we need to be?”

Senior Manager
“At the moment there is no policy or guidance or framework on LGB but it is something that needs to be developed as part of our overall management strategy.”

Senior Manager

“We have people with prejudice who are behaving in a totally unacceptable way in our institution and our way of dealing with it is to embed LGB in a global strategy instead of doing anything very overtly about LGB. It has sort of been buried in a way.”

Senior Manager

Overcoming attitudinal barriers and reconstructing institutional priorities were perceived to be key issues:

“The big barrier is convincing people it is a priority. The difficulty with education at the moment is that it is very target orientated. There are retention and achievement and financial and performance targets. The difficulty is making people see this as a priority amongst targets that might make you lose your job or senior management to lose their jobs. It is showing and justifying it as a priority. When you are under pressure, as a senior manager, there is limited time and people tend to do the priorities that they are measured on. Maybe one of the barriers is not having criteria or measurement on this issue. What I try to do is to change minds rather than just meet measures, Whilst it sounds a bit mechanical there might be a case for some sort of target setting on these issues to see how we are dealing with it and to measure whether we are addressing it because changing hearts always sounds good but it is difficult to measure.”

Senior Manager

“There has been an increasing realisation through senior management, that historically, we have not done as much on LGB as we have on other strands and I do not think we are unique in that respect. Certainly we have realised that we need to do more and we are trying to look at ways in which we can do that.”

Senior Manager

Changing the institutional ethos and culture was also seen as being important in creating an inclusive learning environment.

“One of the potential hurdles is that of the laddish, heterosexual culture that often exists in organisations. For these people there is the potential that LGB issues might be alien and those attitudes go potentially all the way up to the top and that includes the governors.”

Senior Manager
“Senior management input and drive is essential. It is a case of realistically assessing where we are now and where we want to be in terms of what we are doing. It is developing an institutional drive so as to make that comfortable change to shift policy, ethos and culture.”

Middle Manager

“The ethos and culture of an organisation comes from the principal and senior management team. Beliefs and values should cascade down, with the right support, for people to understand what it is we expect of them. As an organisation we are strong on saying we will not tolerate any form of discrimination of any kind but I do not think we are overt enough with LGB.”

Senior Manager

“Any change in culture can be quite a slow process as there needs be some reflection on where we are now and where we want to go and then develop an action plan that has clear strategies and clear targets and a time frame attached. At the moment we don’t have that in place. There is a generic document about discrimination but there isn’t a document that breaks down facets of discrimination and how we might deal with it. We need to start with the top, get all senior management to buy in and then start to work with middle managers and then course tutors. Running alongside that we need to develop materials for use in tutorials that enable us to work with our student body as a whole to tackle some of the potential discrimination before it occurs.”

Senior Manager

“There is still a notion that being racist is more serious than being homophobic and that needs addressing.”

Student

“The stage we are at the moment is changing hearts and minds. We do not pretend to have all the answers. We are at the point where we know we need to work with other people to get the college where we want to be. It is about building relationships so we can, as a staff, be in a position where we can work together to achieve what we want to achieve.”

Middle Manager

Prioritising LGB issues was also referenced as having been an obstacle.

“We have tackled complaints of racism and disabilism because we have had alarm bells ringing that made us take action quickly. What we haven’t had is the same sort of information back about gay and lesbian so we have not tackled that in the same proactive way or as quickly as other stuff but clearly it is something that we need and want to do.”

Senior Manager
This in many ways arises from the lack of recorded data on homophobic incidents and the lack of adequate reporting mechanisms.

“I do not think that our reporting mechanisms are as effective as I thought they might be. We have a false sense of security around LGB and because of the very few reported incidents we have assumed that people are not experiencing discrimination.”

Senior Manager

“I think that there are less cases of reporting homophobia than racism because I would imagine the individual would have to come out as LGB and that might involve personal repercussions.”

Middle Manager

“Unless there is some concrete evidence it is very hard to deal with an individual who is being homophobic. Without a frame of reference, or a way of adequately reporting and recording incidents, how can it be challenged?”

Senior Manager

Developing, embedding and enforcing policy and training were seen as being central to delivering effective leadership.

“There is no mandatory training on sexuality as there has been on disability and race. We have yet to develop that and that is part of the process.”

Senior Manager

“We don’t currently have a strategy that is specifically around LGB. We have a strategy around equal opportunities but I think we need to break it down further so that we have a very clear and distinct strategy. We have an inconsistency around our practice that is not acceptable. We wouldn’t accept it for course files so why are we accepting it for LGBT?”

Senior Manager

However, it was also noted that strategy and policy will only be effective if implementation is effectively managed.

“We have policies about everything but to be honest my view on policies is that they are only as good as the people who implement them, embed them and believe in them. It is the practice that matters.”

Senior Manager
It was felt that LGB issues should be visible within the institution and that they should be given the same priority as other diversity strands.

“It is having a policy that is visible. It is about the college being seen to have taken a stance on dealing with homophobia. Until recently, I did not think it was visible or it was a part of what we did with regard to how we challenged discrimination.”

Curriculum Leader

“When we look at publicity we always make sure we reflect race, disability, gender, I don’t know what we do about LGB. I would suspect nothing. How would you do it?”

Middle Manager

What does effective leadership, in creating and implementing frameworks and guidelines on sexual orientation issues mean in practice?

It was widely perceived by respondents to be important that senior management should have a top down positive ethos about LGB.

“LGBT is a high priority for us because I have decided anything to do with people who are disempowered; anything that affects an individual from reaching their potential has to be knocked down. Prejudice against gays or lesbians is a priority because it is a barrier block and anything that is a barrier needs to be attacked. Effective leadership is someone at a senior level prepared to show support and be proactive in driving the agenda. It is not just about the legal requirements, everybody has to meet those. I am interested in developing the concepts of equality and embedding non discriminatory behaviour in everything that we do. I think there has to be a champion at a very senior level and we have a lot of work to do here in driving LGB equality at a macro level. It is about linking up with the LGB community, having awareness days and challenging prejudice. It is about embedding these issues in the curriculum, which has started in some areas. It is about integrating equality in to the curriculum and it becoming part of the learning. We are not fully there at the moment. I am very interested in looking at diversity in the curriculum and that is where we need to turn our attention. We are committed to taking a stand on LGB in terms of celebrating diversity and being part of making a difference.”

Senior Manager

“I would want to know that if anything happened to me that I could go to a tutor or someone higher up and that they would deal with it. I would want support and something to be done. I am not sure if this would happen. Do they really care?”

Student
“I chair the equal opportunities committee and I am at liberty to influence what is on their plan for the year. We are going to take the work that we are doing on LGB to that group. Membership of that group consists of all the directors of the organisation so there is quite a big impact. I also have a significant input in terms of what goes on in staff development week and I am making contributions there on LGB diversity issues. LGB is going to be one of the pre-eminent diversity strands that we target this year.”

Senior Manager

“There has to be, in terms of senior management, a will to drive the agenda and we are committed to driving LGB from the top. I am interested that we develop the concepts of equality and non discriminatory behaviour and in order to do that I think you need to have a champion at a very senior level. My work is driving these things at a macro level and we are making links with communities. We should be integrating LGB in the curriculum, including it as part of the learning ethos. I have insisted that at the start of every term we have a package on diversity issues and every lecturer is supposed to go through that with their students. As a diversity package it should be covering all the themes. It is updated regularly so when students come in they are briefed by the lecturers on the issues.”

Senior Manager

Senior management funding initiatives, and supporting personnel to develop and disseminate LGBT resources and attend training was seen as vital.

“I have the support of senior management to push LGBT issues forward throughout the college. The funding would not have been there without that support. The funding and development of the LGBT committee has come via management and support has been readily available. I feel I am getting support and that it is not just me who wants to develop this area, but that it is the management team who want to carry it forward.”

Middle Manager

“We like to consider ourselves as proactive in terms of equality and diversity. We have had senior management buy in to what we are doing and their support is fundamental in the approach and direction that the college has taken.”

Middle Manager

The importance of developing training materials for staff and students was regarded as something that senior management had to be involved with and take responsibility for implementing in order to change institutional ethos.
“We have already started to develop LGB training materials and that is part of our on-going process and commitment. There will be an evaluation of these resources and that will inform our on-going strategy”.

Middle Manager

“Effective leadership is to make sure people are linked to training and that someone is responsible for coordination. There should be a steering committee set up and that should comprise of senior managers and middle managers that could then cascade down policy and help put it in to practice. Training should then be cascaded throughout the institution and every single month staff should be sent for essential training much like what happened with the SENDA model of training. Every member of staff, from engineering to the cleaners should be trained. It needs to be an SMT driven agenda and it should be made compulsory for all staff irrespective of departments. SMT have to be made aware of the possibilities for litigation. Litigation is the bullet that can move mountains. Litigation can move mountains and I do not think SMT are fully aware of what needs to be done.”

Curriculum leader

“I think you tackle prejudice on LGB in the same way you do on any other strand of diversity. You engage and challenge. However, people have got to be comfortable attending training and experiencing what they are going to experience and then being able to do something with that. We are effectively challenging heteronormativity and homophobia by being committed to developing inclusive pedagogies and curricula and that is part of something that is going to happen. We could develop a code of practice. It is not something we do at the moment but is something that could help and providing guidance within the OTL framework would help address that all teaching materials are equitable. We are moving towards being part of an overall respect agenda and that means providing a supportive environment for staff and pupils who wish to be known that they are LGBT. LGBT equality issues are part of the action plan for training for the forthcoming year.”

Senior Management

It was felt that the monitoring and reporting of LGB incidents needed to be addressed and that specific mechanisms should be put in place around monitoring and reporting homophobic incidents.

“We do have a hate crime nominee and that person has been instrumental in notifying tutors about what to do if they encounter homophobia. I think that we probably do need to do more specific work in the area. We need to look at how we build policy into teaching and learning. We were thinking about this prior to the 2006 Equality Act and it is something that we embody in our beliefs, although as far as I am aware, we have not taken feedback from people about whether they think we do embody it.”

Senior Manager
“Monitoring of LGB abuse doesn’t happen. It should be happening and it would be easy to add on to the other forms of categories of complaint.”

Middle Manager

“You hear stuff about ‘queers’ all the time, not just in the canteen but in class as well. The lecturers don’t do anything about it. So you kind of think there is no point saying anything ‘cos they can’t be bothered. When I did say something to a tutor, I was told I was being too sensitive and to stop making a fuss.”

Student

“I kept being called “dyke” and nothing was done about it even though it was happening in front of my lecturer. The name calling got worse. I would be walking down the corridor and people would call out “lezzer”. I then got my head knocked against a wall and that was when I decided to change course and move to another campus. The trouble is I wasn’t out and the last thing I was going to do was to go up to someone and say I was a lesbian.”

Student

What can leaders do to successfully get all staff to support sexuality diversity as being an integral part of an institutional ethos?

Buying in specialist knowledge and training was viewed as being imperative for developing and sustaining LGB issues within the organisation.

“We need somebody who can champion the training around LGB. Currently we have developed relationships with external members of the LGB community to constitute a committee, promote events and possible training for the area. We are working in conjunction with a lot of different agencies such as the police force and the local authority. Last year for staff development week we bought in EACH and both sessions were completely fully booked. One of the things we have realised is that we can’t tackle these issues on our own. We are liaising with other agencies and organisations to tackle these problems.”

Middle Manager

The quality of training provided was an issue and it was suggested that any training provided should be made compulsory.

“The session I attended on homophobia only reached about 20/30 staff. It should be made mandatory. It is the same old faces.”

Lecturer

The suggestion was also made that SMT should prioritise LGB training and fund a post that would solely concentrate on developing and delivering resources and supporting staff to implement policy practically. This view was supported by middle managers, lecturers and students who felt a more focused approach would be productive.
“Most tutors would want an external agency to deliver training on LGB so they know that it is being done right and that everything is being covered. Tutors need to know that there is a person or persons available to answer all their questions in depth and offer specialist advice on delivery. That is what is needed and what SMT have to provide if tutors are going to buy in to this.”

Lecturer

“It would be ideal if we could have a LGB champion to help people report incidents. That would be a plus in working towards ensuring sexuality and equality is delivered and is seen to be delivered.”

Curriculum leader

“We need to go back to the drawing board. We need to ensure that we buy in people with expertise who are responsible for managing sexuality equality across the organisation. We must ensure that we feed in the right tools and support to make sure that that LGB is embedded in what we do.”

Senior Manager

“Visibility and presence is really important. We need a funded LGB officer for a year and investment for someone to coordinate, manage and cascade it down like SENDA was cascaded. This person could go in to areas and deliver support. That could make a real difference.”

Lecturer

“There was an incident in my curriculum area in which a young man who had just come out was receiving some very homophobic remarks. He had come to see me and was absolutely beside himself. He was not a confident person and was very upset. He was feeling challenged and intimidated. It turned out the person making the remarks was an ex student so I sought him out and politely asked him to leave the campus after explaining that his remarks were unacceptable and would not be tolerated. He refused to leave so I asked security to escort him off the premises. I think that has to be the only way to deal with someone if they cannot curb their homophobic opinions in an environment that does not accept that kind of outpouring. If they refuse to alter their language or behaviour then you have to remove that person. The visibility surrounding that incident was very important as many people were aware of it happening. It sent a very clear message to all students that his behaviour was not acceptable. So often snide remarks can build and they can have a debilitating impact if not challenged. For me, it is important to challenge homophobia in everyday language and challenge, wherever we can, the prejudice that students sometimes bring to an institution.”

Curriculum Leader
What has been the impact and benefits in challenging homophobia?

Communicating that LGBT harassment by students is unacceptable and will not be tolerated by staff in the institution. Challenging homophobic language makes it known that the institution does not accept discrimination.

“In the past, I have heard in my presence, comments from staff that I would term as homophobic. I made it clear to these individuals that I don’t accept them and on the whole now I don’t hear it now because they know they would not get away with it. It has to be said that one cannot change opinions overnight but I do think the personal influence of being a manager and using that position in a very positive way to say “NO” to homophobic remarks makes sure that everyone understands the message. It is also good to have a positive role model as in many ways there is no other way. If we can be visibly positive about LGB, then in my view, that can only be a good thing.”

Middle Manager

Creating a learning and social environment that is LGB supportive.

“In my area we have had students that have come out during their time with us and who are happy to express their sexual orientation because they know, in our department, we will not tolerate discrimination and that they will be supported. If the environment of the college enables a visible presence, well in my opinion that naturally brings up discussion about LGB issues in tutorials and in the curriculum. In dealing with homophobia, many staff in my area are quite willing to express themselves and address LGB issues. We have also gone further in that we have used LGB issues as a starting point for performances and that is due to the interests of the staff over the years.”

Curriculum Leader

Addressing existing prejudices.

“In tutorials it is a topic that we highlight and tutors don’t feel uncomfortable. I think the students are quite happy to discuss the issue because of the tutor’s approach. Some students have stereotypical views that come from their family backgrounds and we deal with those straight away. One of the best ways to challenge prejudice is to make it easy for LGB students to be open and that generates discussion that becomes a platform to talk about LGB in a peer group setting. If there was a homophobic bullying incident, that would be dealt with straight away under the gross misconduct or misconduct policy and as Head of department that is where I would get involved immediately. My staff aren’t slow in coming forward and nipping these incidents in the bud as they know that they would get my full backing and support. My staff pick up on language such “That’s so gay” and they tackle it and let it be known that we as a department do not accept it.”

Head of Department
Making students aware of wider legislation and how their prejudices might impact upon their future employment.

“In terms of preparing people for the world of work... if we are not raising awareness of this in the college and the students replicate prejudice in the workplace then they could lose their job. There is legislation that says you cannot do prejudice. We are preparing them for employment and if we fail to prepare them properly they could lose their job. I say, we are an educational establishment which should be propagating the values which are essential in our society. We are an educational training establishment and we cannot go with attitudes that are unacceptable. We must say what the proper values are so that our students know what they are.”

Curriculum Leader

Changing the ethos and culture of an institution.

“As a manager and lecturer, effective leadership is a personal commitment and having a strong tutorial input that is not a one off. Also to have an embedded policy as non compliance with college policy could then result in a disciplinary. As a manager, I would then be in a position to say to a student or a staff member that you were told and talked to about diversity in induction. There would then be no excuse or cloudiness about the college’s views on discrimination re sexuality. If discrimination is challenged with staff and students, and there is a policy, then they have nowhere to go with it. Students know where the college stands. Having a poster on the wall that explicitly states the policy is a good starting point, as is having a tutorial resource that empowers tutors to address LGB early on in students’ courses. We pride ourselves on being an inclusive college and we welcome students from all sorts of backgrounds but that brings all sorts of prejudices that we may have to challenge and we do.”

Curriculum Leader

“At the start of each academic year the students receive an induction to the course and I give a talk about what is expected of them academically and behaviourally. I explicitly reference and make it quite clear that in our department any form of prejudice will not be tolerated. I name the different sorts of discrimination so that they fully understand and cannot come back and say they didn’t know. There are posters up in our department that reinforce the message and from day one it is made explicit that remarks such as “That’s gay” will be dealt with in the form of a verbal warning.”

Lecturer
“I introduce LGB issues as part of my curriculum. It is something I do and the students know that. It is often the first time the students have critically encountered LGB and it provokes discussion of heteronormativity and homophobia. It lances the boil so to speak and allows me as a lecturer to deal with students’ misconceptions and prejudices. Embedding LGB in the curriculum is a way of dealing with homophobia head on, the students have to engage.”

Lecturer

What resources would have to be developed to meet training needs around LGBT issues?

Policy and guidance frameworks for dealing with incidents of homophobia by students.

“When I first started work at the college I was working with a group of students and there was this one individual who had strong views about particular groups of people and would often talk about inflammatory subjects. There was one occasion when the conversation between him and another male member of the group was about his hatred of homosexuals and very loud comments were made that were offensive. He was talking about how he couldn’t understand why they did what they did; how it was unnatural and that it wasn’t in the bible and so on. I had challenged him throughout the morning in a friendly way on his use of language but I wanted to challenge him whilst keeping the peace within the group. It was quite a difficult situation and, one that to be honest, I didn’t feel fully prepared for dealing with. There were several factors: I didn’t feel prepared for dealing with the aggression and at that point there wasn’t any presence or any mention of the college being strongly anti discrimination on the basis of sexuality. We had zero tolerance posters up on racism for a short time and I remember thinking at the time, “what could I do?” I was not entirely sure of my position in how to challenge the remarks and that made me angry and I don’t think I reacted in the best way. I look back at that situation now and I think, had I been prepared… had he been racist or sexist to the extent he was being, I would have felt prepared and I would have known how to deal with it. It is having a policy and knowledge that it is something the college takes a stance on. At that point there was no visibility in the college’s stance on homophobia. I didn’t think it was a part of what we did. We challenged other forms of discrimination …. I think it has definitely changed over the last couple of years. LGB issues have been raised formally, they have been part of management discussions and training. Very recently there has been a strong understanding, in a managerial context about LGB discrimination and some excellent training that has been embedded as part of a college drive for retention. We need, as managers and lecturers, practical strategies to tackle LGB discrimination. I still don’t think it is something that we do well enough.
I have not heard of any training for new members of staff for challenging inappropriateness, they are sort of left to their own instincts. There needs to be a policy and training to back you up. It can be quite daunting when you are having to deal with an aggressive person. To know that there is a policy, to know what you can say and how to challenge homophobia is needed.

Lecturer

Learning materials to be used with students.

“We have diversity booklets that we use through tutorials but they tend to be around disability and race and gender, we need to extend that to LGB.”

Lecturer

Developing audits to ensure effective delivery.

“We need to put in place mechanisms that check if tutorials are delivering on LGB or whether tutors are opting out of delivery.”

Middle Manager

Developing LGBT as being part of the academic and vocational curriculum.

“The art of the training needs to be about how we develop and reflect LGB within the curriculum. It is not just about awareness raising it is about how discrimination impacts upon teaching and learning and how lecturers work with the groups they are teaching to embed awareness and understanding, it needs to start there. We need to be identifying people who can work on a programme of training in the way we have worked with other areas and I am not sure we are anywhere near that identification at the moment. We do things at a fairly superficial level. We have diversity week but people who go to things at diversity week are usually the people who understand and embrace equality and inclusion anyway.”

Senior Manager

“We need to focus on curriculum development. It should embody discrimination and equal opportunities. How we deal with this should be in teaching and learning, it should be in the materials and the language we use and it should be reflected in observations of teaching and learning and in the annual course audit. There needs to be more training for people to really dig it in.”

Senior Manager

“On my course, my lecturer does some stuff on gay people in the arts and it is really interesting. I feel included and we have some really interesting discussions. Other students always come up and ask me questions about being gay and they have been really supportive.”

Student
Funding a dedicated post to drive LGBT throughout different curriculum areas.

“I think it would be ideal if we could have a LGBT champion to help people report incidents. That would be a plus in working towards ensuring sexuality and equality is delivered and is seen to be delivered.”

Curriculum leader

Introducing mandatory staff training.

“Before any member of staff walks in to a classroom we must make sure that the tick list is ticked and that clearly is not the case at the moment. It should be mandatory in training that LGB is covered and only then would the college see the benefits for staff, for the learners and their learning.”

Lecturer

“Management need to provide a comprehensive induction that identifies the key issues of LGB. As a manager that would help me support other staff.”

Middle Manager

Celebrating sexuality diversity by linking with national events.

“Do we do a pride week here? We desperately need to educate people. Maybe the college could release funds for a pride event?”

Lecturer

Developing curriculum resources and training on how to embed LGB in teaching and learning.

“I think LGB should be embedded as part of what we do in curriculum areas. However, there are some curriculum areas that I am sure will be resistant to it being part of their delivery which is why it should be supported by training and resources. There has got to be something that says this is the baseline, this is where we are and this is what we do. Let’s be honest we need more training. I know I have insider knowledge and that my perception of the issues are enhanced by knowing LGB people, so it becomes personal and that is the strongest way of dealing with this issue. How do you translate that in to the bigger picture? I am not sure but there must be ways of doing it. We need to tap into training and learn about how to do it.”

Middle Manager

“An office/ drop-in space is vital. A space that operates as an information point for staff, as well as an informal meeting spot for all. I think LGB issues should have their own dedicated training sessions for staff and students. Race, gender and disability have quite a head start in terms of college support, and these issues were also addressed separately as they arose ‘back in the day’.”

Lecturer
Conclusions and Recommendations

This research project has found that it is important for senior management to promote a whole institution approach to challenging homophobic behaviour. Senior management were aware that cultural change does not happen overnight and that colleagues needed to be supported in challenging homophobic behaviours and heteronormative practices and attitudes. Delivering effective leadership is ensuring that all those who work in educational domains adhere to an ethos of tackling homophobic language and behaviour wherever it is encountered and to promote sexual diversity in the delivery of teaching and learning materials. Effective leadership would inculcate an institutional ethos which makes explicit that homophobic incidents are not tolerated and would, by way of policy and training, equip staff with the knowledge and skills effectively and confidently to deal with such incidents.

Senior management articulated how a major obstacle in implementing change was overcoming employees’ personal discomfort in talking about LGB issues with students. It was also acknowledged that there was some uncertainty about how to best challenge homophobic remarks made by colleagues and students. It was also felt, by some of the informants, that uncertainty was a key factor in preventing the introduction of policies, training and resources. The sentiment was expressed of ‘maybe getting it wrong and causing more harm than good’.

The informants called for guidelines and frameworks to be introduced that could be referred to in the event of an incident. Some members of staff felt there was a lack of procedural knowledge on how best to deal with an homophobic incident and whilst some staff utilised the existing grievances policy, it was felt, by other staff, that a discrete policy needed to be introduced; that this needed to be made visible and communicated to all staff members and the student body.

The seriousness of students using homophobic language whilst addressed by some members of staff was not being tackled by all staff. It was noted that some staff failed to take seriously allegations of homophobic bullying or discrimination and that specific training was needed to ensure that all staff address discriminatory behaviour. There was a general consensus that specialist, bought in training was needed; that it should be ongoing and that it should be made mandatory so as to ensure that all staff have the skills, confidence and techniques to deal with homophobic incidents.

It was noted that whilst the college delivered an induction that sets out the college’s values, expectations and requirements in relation to equality and diversity, sexual orientation was not being sufficiently addressed. It was suggested that LGB issues should be embedded in the curriculum, be present in schemes of work and that all teaching learning materials should reflect the college’s commitment to addressing exclusionary practices. It was felt that a one off tutorial on generic equality and diversity might be insufficient and that a tick list approach to dealing with discriminatory attitudes and practices could be counter productive.
It was acknowledged that homophobic incidents are likely to be significantly underreported. Anecdotal evidence from the interviews indicated that there are a number of reasons behind reluctance to report a homophobic incident: victims might not be willing to identify as LGB; they may be concerned about confidentiality and inadvertently outing themselves to staff and students; they may not know where or how to report an incident and also there was uncertainty about what could be done by the institution or that the incident might not be taken seriously. The lack of adequate reporting mechanisms was a factor for some staff knowing how to deal with incidents and whilst it was noted that the sanctions for homophobic acts have parity to those of other acts of discrimination, it was felt that homophobic incidents needed to be recorded differently.

There were some differences of opinion as to whether sexuality equality could be embedded in a generic diversity strategy or whether it would be more productive to have a distinct, separate strategy that was focused solely on LGB. The majority of informants felt that a distinct strategy would be more productive in challenging heteronormative attitudes and homophobic incidents. It was felt that there was a need for a specific person within the institution, whether a seconded or funded position, that could champion LGB issues and provide resources and support across curriculum areas.

There was a general consensus amongst all of the participants, that the most effective way to overcome barriers for addressing sexuality equality was for senior management to act as an advocate for, and champion LGB issues within the institution. This would involve implementing policy changes and developing staff training that specifically address LGB equality issues. Central to the success in changing perceptions, or ‘hearts and minds’ was for senior management to make visible their support and to make visible and celebrate sexuality diversity within all curriculum areas and across all marketing and publicity activities. It was felt by LGB students, lecturers and some middle managers that visibility was a key issue in overcoming barriers and that publicity can play an important part in maximising awareness of attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. Visibility is important as it can send the message that the institution is LGB friendly and by having images of LGB people around college (such as posters, information leaflets and in the prospectus) can make a difference. It was also noted how inclusive publicity materials can positively impact and address cultures of heteronormativity and be used to prevent unacceptable behaviour to the wider student and staff body.

During the focus group discussions, it was suggested that senior management should consider:

- Increasing the number of positive images round the institution that challenge stereotypes of individuals and communities;
- Include and make explicit reference to LGBT issues in all marketing and recruitment materials;
- Include and make explicit reference to anti discriminatory policy on LGBT in all marketing and recruitment materials.
In order to develop good practice and inculcate a college culture that promotes respect and positive attitudes towards LGB identified individuals, SMT should be personally and professionally committed to challenge homophobic and heterosexist values by individual example and through reinforcing institutional anti-discriminatory policy. Promoting respect within an institution can be implemented by having annual awareness raising initiatives such as being involved in:

- LGBT History Month;
- International Day against Homophobia;
- National and regional Pride events;
- Becoming a Stonewall diversity champion.

As part of their commitment to addressing LGB issues and raising awareness of sexuality equality, the institution consults with external agencies through a LGBT community forum. It has staged events for LGBT history month, both within the college and in the wider LGBT community, including:

- A transgender Talk for PCET pre-service group
- A transgender Workshop
- A community disco
- A Press release and Launch of LGBT forum (see example).
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Forum is launched

The ........................................... will be playing host to the launch of LGBT Forum for ......................... Thursday 28th February 2008 at 5pm. Guests will be joined by Dan Bryan (Big Brother 5) who will officially launch the event with music from a local DJ.

The LGBT Forum; the only organisation of its kind in the area will work in collaboration with a range of local partners including the police and the council to tackle problems faced by LGBT people.

Their aim is to increase the visibility and voice of LGBT people and in addition they will attempt to ensure that the specific needs of the LGBT Community are met with regard to safety and service provision.

The launch of this forum is an exciting development for individuals, the community and ................... - as we work towards equality for all and to achieve the maximum potential from the diversity of our people.

The concept behind the forum is to provide an official channel of communication and influence between the LGBT community in ................... and organisations responsible for ensuring community safety and advising on specific community safety needs.

The community of .............. are invited to attend the launch event and future meetings to work towards the development of a community based forum that will empower the LGBT community of .............. and celebrate our diversity.

The college is strategically committed to addressing LGBT; it has made a financial commitment to supporting and developing awareness of LGBT and has recently been awarded £35,000 by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to fund the institution’s LGBT Forum for the next 12 months. This will fund meetings, training, events and research. The institution has already bought in external agencies to provide staff training on LGBT (EACH) as the SMT is aware that historically LGBT issues have not been adequately addressed.

The SMT have acknowledged that current policy needs reviewing and that LGBT needs to be embedded in audits of teaching and learning, curriculum content and course reviews. The SMT are in the process of identifying the barriers that prevent sexualities inequalities being addressed within the institution. The SMT are supporting critical engagement with the issues surrounding sexuality in the college and are committed to addressing sexuality-related diversity and inclusion as a social justice issue.
Postscript

The trouble with being homosexual in educational domains could be that some identities are judged to have more value than others; heterosexuality is invariably perceived as universal and ‘natural’ whereas other forms of sexuality get thought of as unnatural, odd, perverse and ‘queer’.

Respondents to Stonewall’s (1996) survey of hate crimes indicated that 48% of under 18 year-olds had experienced homophobia, 90% had been called names because of their perceived sexual orientation and 50% of violent attacks had involved fellow students with 40% of those incidents taking place in educational domains. Telljohann & Price (1993) have noted how, in educational domains, rejection around sexual orientation is actively performed and if homophobic bullying is unchallenged then the impact of stigmatisation and the consequences of embodying sexual differences can often be social isolation and victimisation. Despite moves to combat homophobia in educational institutions there continue to be barriers to changing heteronormative practices in educational domains. In order to overcome these obstacles, difficulties and uncertainties that FE colleges may have in addressing sexualities inequalities and exclusionary practices, this research has attempted to identify ways forward that leaders in the learning and skills sector could engage with LGBT as part of a social inclusion agenda.

Acknowledgements

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References


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Further Information and Contact Details

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We recognise that there are many innovative and effective leaders and leadership practices in the Sector that warrant investigation, analysis and wider dissemination of best practice. We would like to engage with existing networks within the Sector and develop a wider practice-led research community contributing to current debates on leadership and other related issues.

If you would like to receive further information on the Research Programme, please contact:

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