

Tackling homophobia and transphobia in settings supporting young people: What are the barriers and facilitators? Findings from a South Yorkshire study

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Tackling homophobia and
transphobia in settings
supporting young people: What
are the barriers and facilitators?
Findings from a South Yorkshire
study



Sheffield
Hallam University



Centre
for HIV & Sexual Health

Eleanor Formby
with Ben Willis

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Finally thanks to Sheffield Hallam University's Public Health Hub for agreeing to finance the project.

Foreword

This report on homophobia and transphobia carried out in South Yorkshire represents a collaborative piece of work between Sheffield Hallam University, Chilypep and the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health. Chilypep as a youth participation agency has worked for a number of years in supporting and developing the voice of LGBT young people. Through their development of GLOBAL (Gay, Lesbian and Others Becoming Active Leaders), a young people's forum that challenged homophobia, they learnt more about how homophobia impacts on young people's lives in so many ways. The organisation witnessed the lack of support for many LGBT young people leaving them often isolated, unheard and unsafe. At the same time they saw how young people took responsibility for challenging that homophobia and worked to change it. Sadly - and somewhat ironically in light of this report - the work of GLOBAL eventually came to an end due to a lack of funding.

The Centre for HIV and Sexual Health in Sheffield, which is a part of the NHS, has worked for almost 25 years in the area of sexual health promotion - at both a local level and national level. The Centre has consistently recognised the importance of issues such as homophobia and transphobia and the significant impact they have on the health and well-being of members of the LGBT communities. The Centre has produced resources, arranged events and delivered conferences and training courses designed to highlight the health impacts of homophobia and transphobia. Programmes of outreach work and group work with members of the LGBT communities have continued to inform practice and raise awareness within the team of the extent and level of homophobia and transphobia in our communities - and in institutions such as schools and the workplace.

This report makes salutary and upsetting reading. In both schools and youth work settings LGBT young people still face prejudice, misunderstanding and on occasions the threat of physical violence. The report highlights the full spectrum of homophobia and transphobia and its multi-faceted manifestations; ranging from the denial of the existence of LGBT young people in school (and the dismissive attitude that their experiences are just part of a phase), through to examples of shocking acts of abuse.

There is still so much more to do to ensure that LGBT young people can live fulfilled, safe and happy lives in which they are able to be open and engaged with the communities in which they live. We need to continue to develop the support groups and campaigning organisations that young people need to challenge the homophobia and transphobia faced by LGBT young people in their schools, in youth settings and in their communities. It is simply not acceptable that young LGBT people should continue to experience much of the abuse which is outlined in this report.

We welcome this report and hope that we will all use its findings to push for more resources to challenge homophobia and transphobia and ensure the voices of LGBT young people are heard. It is vital that this document is widely distributed and acted upon.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the dedication, hard work and commitment shown to this study by its author Eleanor Formby, with the support of Ben Willis.

Sara Gowen, Chilypep and Steve Slack, Centre for HIV and Sexual Health

November 2011

Glossary of terms

Biphobia – Fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexual people

Chilypep – Children and Young People’s Empowerment Project

CHIV – Centre for HIV and Sexual Health

Fruitbowl – Youth group for LGBT under 18s based in Sheffield

GLOBAL – Gay, Lesbian and Others Becoming Active Leaders

Homophobia – Fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of lesbian, gay and bisexual people

IDAHO – International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia

KS – Key Stage

LGB – Lesbian, gay and bisexual

LGBT – Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans

PE – Physical Education

PSHE – Personal, Social, Health and Economic education

SEAL – Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

Section 28 – Section of the Local Government Act 1988 which prohibited the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality as a “pretended family relationship”. It was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and in the rest of the UK in 2003

Sheffield LGBT Charter – Sheffield LGBT Education Champions Charter

Side by Side – Peer education project based in Sheffield challenging homophobia within schools

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

SRE – Sex and Relationships Education

Stonewall – National charity working for equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people

THT – Terrence Higgins Trust; national HIV/AIDS charity

Trans – Umbrella term to refer to people who may not wholly identify as either ‘male’ or ‘female’ and/or who may identify as transgender, transsexual, transvestite, etc.

Transphobia – Fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans people

Executive summary

Introduction and research methods

Existing research has identified the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools, and the impact this can have on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) young people's mental health and wellbeing, as well as their educational achievement (Guasp, 2009; Hunt and Jenson, 2007; McDermott et al, 2008; Mitchell and Howarth, 2009; Rivers and Noret, 2008; Tippett et al, 2010; Warwick et al, 2004). However, less research is available on how LGBT issues are supported within youth work provision.

This study aimed to gather data in South Yorkshire about views and experiences of the inclusion of LGBT issues within schooling and youth work, with an explicit focus on barriers and facilitators. This summary includes findings from both young people and professionals who work with them, and suggests some recommendations for future practice. It also provides further information in the form of signposting to additional resources and references.

The data is drawn from three sources:

- a self-completion questionnaire for young people, to which there were 146 responses from young people aged 13-21
- eight in-depth group discussions with young people aged 11-20, involving 65 participants in total. Two of these took place within schools and six took place within youth work settings
- nine in-depth interviews with professionals. Four of these were teachers and five were youth workers.

Each of these elements included participants who identified as heterosexual and lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).

Findings and conclusions by theme

Whilst this project was relatively small and cannot claim to have generated universally generalisable results, it does add weight to a growing body of work in this area. Its strength also lies in its focus on barriers and facilitators to delivery, as these issues need to be understood if improvements are to be made.

School coverage and teaching about LGBT issues

The survey and in-depth methods with young people suggests that there is currently patchy inclusion of LGBT matters within schooling. Recent national research on personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) also suggested that, contrary to government guidance, approaches to homophobic bullying specifically are rarely embedded within the formal curriculum (Formby et al, 2011). Trans issues, in particular, are least likely to be addressed. Staff and young people noted that LGBT inclusion was more likely to be supported (just) within the PSHE curriculum than in any other subject areas or embedded across the entire curriculum. Generally, use of whole-school approaches and/or specific resources, such as LGBT history month, was low, though sometimes youth workers were involved in specialist awareness-raising delivery.

As the majority of young people involved in face-to-face methods had not experienced any LGBT-related teaching, the contrast between this 'taboo' and invisibility within the formal curriculum, and the visibility of homosexuality within informal contexts was stark. This was often related to the prevalence of homophobic language use among young people, but also a 'natural' interest in, or curiosity about, (homo)sexuality. In comparison, some staff implied that LGBT issues were only of interest to LGBT young people, and therefore that the relevance within their practice or organisation was limited. This argument was most often

made about trans issues, demonstrating a (mis)understanding that a person identifying as trans would always be visible to staff (and therefore that they 'knew' that they had no trans pupils). Most staff suggested that there was less awareness and familiarity with trans inclusion, and felt that it was not as "easy" as LGB inclusion.

"Because there are so few trans students at our age group, we're still trying to embed L and G to be honest, and maybe stretch to B. The T issues might be a bit too far out for staff and governors to get their heads round at the moment!" (Teacher)

It could be argued, however, that equality and diversity issues need to be addressed within schools and youth settings regardless of the pupil make-up, i.e. all young people should be taught about sexism, all young people taught about racism, and all young people taught about LGBT equality.

Both survey and qualitative findings suggest that young people are generally open and willing to learn about LGBT issues, for example 90% felt that learning about LGBT issues was important. Some participants explicitly recommended greater visibility and awareness-raising to try and combat homophobia; it was thought that this might have potential gains for LGB young people wanting to come out and/or report bullying. This curiosity and relative comfort with the subject area contrasted with some apparent staff uneasiness, as discussed further below.

Barriers to delivery for staff

Both strategic/conceptual and practical barriers to staff delivery in this area were identified:

1. *Not being a priority within the organisation*: this included a feeling that the subject area was "not highly regarded" or that there were "more important things". Schools in particular were said to not invest time or money for training and resources if it was not a priority. For some young people this implied a lack of care for LGBT pupils
2. *No sex please, we're British*: this quote from a participant sums up the wide-scale discomfort or embarrassment about sex more generally which was explicitly related to ambivalence about LGBT inclusion. This was identified among both teachers and youth workers, with some thinking it was a "grey area" how much youth workers' personal views were 'allowed' to affect their practice. Anxieties about 'turning' young people gay by educating them about same-sex relationships were also suggested
3. *Fear as a barrier*: this was often identified as a key issue by both staff and young people, and could include fears (often unjustified) about parental complaints (potentially tied to "misleading" media coverage), fears about 'getting it wrong', and fears about objections from religious community leaders (which were said to be hard to tackle)
4. *Stigma by association*: staff fearing questions or "allegations" about their own sexuality because of their involvement in teaching/supporting LGB issues was also identified, linked as well to some ongoing staff reluctance to come/be out in professions working with children and young people. This could make staff reluctant to be involved in awareness-raising delivery and/or challenge homophobic language use and bullying
5. *Funding*: this could affect the longevity and effectiveness of support available to young people, and potentially related to diversity strands 'competing' for particular funding streams
6. *Skills gaps, staff confidence, and use of resources*: this range of issues included lack of expertise in the area, lack of confidence to approach the subject, and lack of awareness of, or available access to, appropriate resources or training, which could result in misleading information being given to young people.

Facilitative support and resources for staff

Three broad (and interlinked) themes were said to aid LGBT support or inclusion:

1. *Management support and other supportive infrastructures*: the importance of senior leadership team (SLT) support, together with the embedding of equality policies, was often seen as vital for this area of work. A whole-school approach was also often highlighted. Each of these factors gave staff confidence, in addition to the support that could be provided by a specialist PSHE department, more general collegial support and/or a specific LGBT steering committee. External contact networks were also said to provide positive role models and peer support
2. *LGBT champion*: this could also facilitate the inclusion of this area, with one key person (preferably a formalised role) to drive this agenda forward
3. *Confidence, external visitors and supportive resources*: staff confidence, in part related to access to training and/or the ability to tap into supportive external agencies or resources was also identified as important. Sometimes drawing on the personal experience of gay workers was seen to be more “powerful” in this regard.

“I felt I ran the service better because I’d been there... you don’t know what it’s truly like until you’ve actually experienced it... you’re constantly outing yourself but if it’s making that young person feel more safe...” (Youth worker)

Discrimination, bullying and language use

Young people identified the existence of homophobic bullying in relation to young people identifying as (or rumoured to be) LGB, those with parents in same-sex relationships, and those that were perceived to be ‘different’ in some way, thereby marking them out as potentially gay. This included much experience of verbal abuse, though was not restricted to this. To a certain extent, LGB young people appeared to expect, and sometimes even ‘accept’, the bullying they experienced. The reported impact of this bullying included (sometimes severe) mental health issues, and problems related to school attendance and attainment.

“The impact being gay and being out and being bullied has on young people’s mental health is colossal... The amount of mental health issues in that group that we know about is immense, the ones we don’t know about makes me shudder” (Youth worker)

These issues were not always thought to be understood by all professionals. Reluctance to report homophobic bullying was common, perhaps not surprising in some contexts where staff were also reported to make homophobic comments to young people, and where school practices (such as not being allowed to change for PE with other pupils) were felt to be isolating to LGB young people.

“If my son or my daughter was ever gay I’d take them into the back of my garden, tie them to the wall and shoot them with a shotgun” (Young person reporting what a teacher had said at their school)

There was agreement among many young people that homophobic bullying was not always dealt with effectively by schools. Many felt it was not taken as seriously as other forms of bullying, such as racist incidents, which made some young people feel that their allegations were not believed or respected.

“They just think it’s some kind of joke half the time” (Young person)

Tackling ‘casual’ homophobic language use was seen to be even harder, with staff also suggesting this was difficult. There was not always agreement if, or how, these issues should be addressed, partly related to how bullying was defined. Discussions about language often revolved around the extent to which people saw the (negative) use of the word gay as being linked to sexual identity, and therefore could be deemed to be offensive, or whether they believed the two meanings to be unrelated, and therefore it was not an issue

in need of 'tackling'. Use of the word gay in this sense was common among young people (both heterosexual and LGB), and also identified among professionals.

There was a clear contrast between those that felt a 'zero tolerance' approach should silence/stop inappropriate language and/or behaviours, and those that felt homophobia should be allowed to be voiced in order to generate discussion and hopefully, in the long-run, changed attitudes. This latter approach arguably requires more (complex) input from staff, and would mean giving young people the space and 'permission' (at least initially) to voice potential disapproval of LGBT identities/relationships.

Signposting and supporting young people

Signposting local or national support services for LGBT young people was not universal, yet could be important if mainstream staff (teachers and youth workers) were not necessarily supportive.

Often young people wanted their identities to be accepted, respected and understood by staff, which meant staff not assuming that homosexuality was 'confusion' or just "a phase". Staff often highlighted the need for specialist support; where this was not in place some young LGBT people resorted to accessing support services available in neighbouring cities or local authorities, so as to benefit from some form of peer support, even where this was not local to them.

"If you need help you can get it, and you can just talk to people and make new friends who are in the same boat" (Young person)

There were differing opinions about whether workers in these services needed to be gay or not to provide specialist support, though some young people said they would prefer that they were. This dedicated support was also seen to be particularly important where young people were living in unsupportive contexts at home, or experiencing related bullying at school. The safety and validation that these environments provided was often said to be crucial; young people often reported fearing coming out to parents and/or staff so appreciated specialist support.

"This is gonna sound really dramatic but I'd probably be dead if I never came here... because of the amount of bullying that you get" (Young person)

However, whilst specialist support provision was often viewed as necessary, some staff expressed caution in case it was assumed that young LGBT people automatically needed support. Similarly, some young people also highlighted how being referred to counselling could feel, in seeming to apportion blame on them, rather than for instance the perpetrators of bullying.

"I was kind of like, hang on a minute, 'coz it kind of made me feel like 'oh is this my fault now, is there something wrong with me?'" (Young person)

Thinking about the future: improvements and support needs

This study suggests that whilst there are some strong beliefs in equality for LGBT groups among both young people and staff, there are also still views about the 'unnaturalness' of same-sex relationships and a clear view that they are 'different' and 'unfamiliar' and therefore potentially 'wrong'. Whilst some of these attitudes are directly linked to faith values, it was suggested that others could potentially be challenged by greater familiarity and visibility, both within schools and beyond. Those clearly opposed to LGBT inclusion were in the minority among young people.

Recommendations

Schools and youth work facilities are in a strong position to address issues about inequality and/or identity-based bullying, acknowledged by the current Coalition Government (DfE, 2010). New public sector equality duties also mean that schools, like other public bodies, must consider the equality of LGBT pupils (and staff), in addition to other protected characteristics (GEO, 2011).

The recommendations set out here directly arise from data gathered within the study. Their aim is to create a supportive environment for both staff and young people, whatever their own sexual or gender identities.

1. Schools and youth organisations should attempt to embed senior management support for LGBT awareness and support within their service delivery. Where possible, this should clearly be linked to broader equality policies, and in schools adopted via a whole-school approach (not restricted to PSHE alone)
2. In schools, consider having a named governor responsible for LGBT awareness/support
3. Where appropriate, attend to requirements in the Equality Act 2010, and use other policy agendas (e.g. the Sheffield LGBT Charter) to strengthen LGBT work
4. Where possible, identify a strategic LGBT champion within the organisation to drive the agenda forward
5. Investigate the potential for supplementing an LGBT champion role with a specific LGBT organising committee with clear roles and responsibilities, and lines of communication to cascade information up and down within the organisation
6. Consider producing staff briefings to cover key points of importance, such as the importance of confidentiality to young people, whether in school or other service provision
7. Source and facilitate access to staff training for both full time and part time workers. This could include general input on LGBT awareness and equality and diversity, as well as specific guidance on appropriate/neutral language and homophobic and transphobic bullying
8. Where possible, attempt to work in partnership with other schools and service providers to facilitate peer support and the sharing of good practice examples and other experiences. If formal networks are not in place, informal contacts can be used. This should not be restricted to only PSHE teachers. For organisations in Sheffield there is the new Sex and Relationships forum run by the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health
9. Investigate the potential for a named LGBT role within schools and organisations; this could be a designated support worker, or someone identified as a coordinator to act as a first point of contact to signpost and/or support young people. The importance of confidentiality should again be stressed here
10. Make use of appropriate external support agencies where these exist, but ensure this is not perceived as 'passing on' responsibility or duty of care; make sure there are adequate lines of communication in place first
11. Ensure access to appropriate resources to facilitate effective education and/or service delivery. Potential sources of support include GIRES, IDAHO, LGBT history month, and Stonewall (but there are also many others). Local authorities should consider signing up

to the Stonewall Education Champions programme, as Sheffield has done. Schools, and where possible youth organisations, should work towards the goals within Stonewall's guidance, Sheffield's LGBT Charter and/or other local Charters

12. Heighten LGBT visibility on the premises. This could include relevant inclusive library books and posters advertising relevant local events or projects, as well as appropriate national organisations
13. Consult, at regular intervals, with all young people about their expressed needs. Within this, make sure that young people are aware of any support services/mechanisms in place within the organisation
14. Use the above consultation rounds to assess the desire or need for LGBT groups in schools, colleges and youth work settings. Where appropriate, these groups could facilitate networking across towns and cities, for example formalised relationships to Youth Councils or Young Advisors. This might involve named LGBT or equality representatives
15. Ensure access to specialist support services for LGBT young people; this might involve clear signposting and referral systems, or at times could involve service-level agreements. It also clearly entails the ongoing support and funding for existing services, and might necessitate the establishment of new services in areas where these are not currently in existence. Consideration needs to be given to the age range of services and the facilitation of peer support and peer education.

1. Introduction

Schools have been called ‘the last bastion of homophobia’ (Beadle, 2009; Coughlan, 2000; Grew, 2008). In this context, this report builds on recent research which examined current personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) delivery in England. In that research, one senior management team member within a secondary school described homosexuality as a “bomb” in explaining the school’s ambivalence in ‘allowing’ it to enter the classroom as part of their PSHE delivery (Formby et al, 2011). This viewpoint is probably not unusual as evidence suggests that the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people are regularly not fully included, if at all, within the (formal) school curriculum (Formby, 2011a; Forrest et al, 2004; Ofsted, 2010; SEF, 2005; YWCA, 2004). Previous research has also highlighted that the subject of homosexuality can be viewed as a ‘taboo’ subject, at risk of exclusion altogether for fear of tackling it ‘incorrectly’ by staff lacking in confidence, perhaps still linked to the previous existence of Section 28¹ (DePalma and Atkinson, 2006; Formby, 2011a; Waites, 2005).

This lack of inclusion within schools is despite research which highlights existing levels of homophobic and transphobic bullying, and the potential impact of this on the mental health and wellbeing of those who experience it, including ‘self-destructive behaviours’ such as self-harm and suicidal behaviours, and higher incidences of drug, alcohol or tobacco use (McDermott et al, 2008; Mitchell and Howarth, 2009; Rivers and Noret, 2008; Tippett et al, 2010; Warwick et al, 2004). There has also been increasing acknowledgment and interest in the use of the word ‘gay’ as a pejorative term, and the effect this might have on young people’s developing identities and wider emotional wellbeing (Guasp, 2009; Hunt and Jenson, 2007; Thurlow, 2001). An often cited Stonewall report identified that 65% of LGB secondary school pupils experienced homophobic bullying in school, including 17% who experienced death threats (Hunt and Jenson, 2007). However, less specific research is available on how lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) issues are supported within youth work provision, or how differently (or not) biphobia² and transphobia may manifest within schools and youth work settings. Broader evidence also highlights the existence of health inequalities affecting LGBT communities more generally, notably concerning mental and sexual health (Fish, 2007; Formby et al, 2010a, b).

Research suggests that where schools are more supportive environments they can lessen the potential for negative outcomes for LGBT pupils (Espelage et al, 2008; Tippett et al, 2010). This would suggest that schools and youth work facilities are in a strong position to address issues about inequality and/or identity-based bullying, also acknowledged by the current Coalition Government (DfE, 2010; GEO, 2011). New public sector equality duties that came into force earlier this year also mean that schools, like other public bodies, must consider the equality of LGBT pupils (and staff), in addition to other protected characteristics (GEO, 2011).

This study aimed to gather data in South Yorkshire about views and experiences of the inclusion of LGBT issues within schooling and youth work, with an explicit focus on barriers and facilitators. The report will outline findings from both young people and professionals who work with them, and identifies some conclusions and recommendations for future practice. It also provides some further information in the form of signposting to additional

¹ Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 prohibited the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality as a “pretended family relationship”. It was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and in the rest of the UK in 2003.

² Biphobia is not specifically explored within this report, but homophobia is used throughout to also describe the experiences of bisexual young people. Similarly, the word ‘gay’ is used within the report as shorthand for gay, lesbian and bisexual women/men.

resources and references that might be helpful for staff looking to develop their work in this area. This report is primarily aimed at practitioners; further academic publications will be produced in due course.

2. Research methods

A self-completion questionnaire for young people was designed in collaboration with a small number of stakeholders. Most of these questions were closed, but a number were open-ended and allowed respondents to provide their views and experiences without restriction. This was then disseminated and promoted to networks of schools and youth facilities/young people in the region. It was available online, and in hard copy with freepost return envelopes. In all, 146 responses were received, the majority online, and many from just one school. A minority of young people (37) gave their contact details within the survey and said they were willing to participate further in the research. In the end, none of these potential interviews came to fruition, partly for logistical reasons.

Various email invitations were also circulated to staff via multiple networks of contacts within South Yorkshire. This resulted in nine separate in-depth interviews with members of staff working directly with young people. These fell into two groups: secondary school teachers and youth workers (see Table 1). Interviews lasted between 35 minutes and just over two hours, partly reflecting practical constraints on participants' time (though the majority were over an hour). Interviewees included those that had specific remits to work with LGBT young people, and those that did not; teachers interviewed mostly had responsibility for PSHE, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), Healthy Schools and/or Every Child Matters agendas. Participants included those that identified as lesbian or gay themselves, and those that did not.

Organisations and individuals in the region were also contacted to negotiate access to groups of young people, in addition to the invitation to participate further contained within the survey. Altogether, eight discussion groups were held with young people aged between 11 and 20 inclusive, involving a total of 65 individuals (see Table 1). Groups ranged in size from 3 to 18 members; some were single sex, whilst most were mixed. Overall, there were slightly more males involved than females. Discussions took place within school PSHE lessons or at youth clubs (both LGBT-specific and mainstream locality-based provision). Those taking place within youth centres tended to naturally fall into friendship groups of roughly the same age. Discussion length varied, often related to practical constraints, lasting from approximately 20 minutes to one hour and 20 minutes. Most participants were engaged in compulsory schooling, though a minority were in some form of further education or employment, and a small number were not involved in any education or employment. The majority of participants were white.

Table 1: Participant details

Participants	Settings			Total
	School	Youth service (locality-based)	Youth service (LGBT-specific)	
Staff	4	2	3	9
Young people	26	20	19	65
Total	30	22	22	74

It should be noted that despite efforts to include Barnsley and Doncaster, this was not possible within the timescales, so all of these face-to-face methods were conducted with staff and young people in Rotherham and Sheffield.

All interviews and discussions were digitally recorded, written up and analysed thematically. This thematic data analysis is presented within discrete staff and young people's chapters within the report (see Chapters 4 and 5).

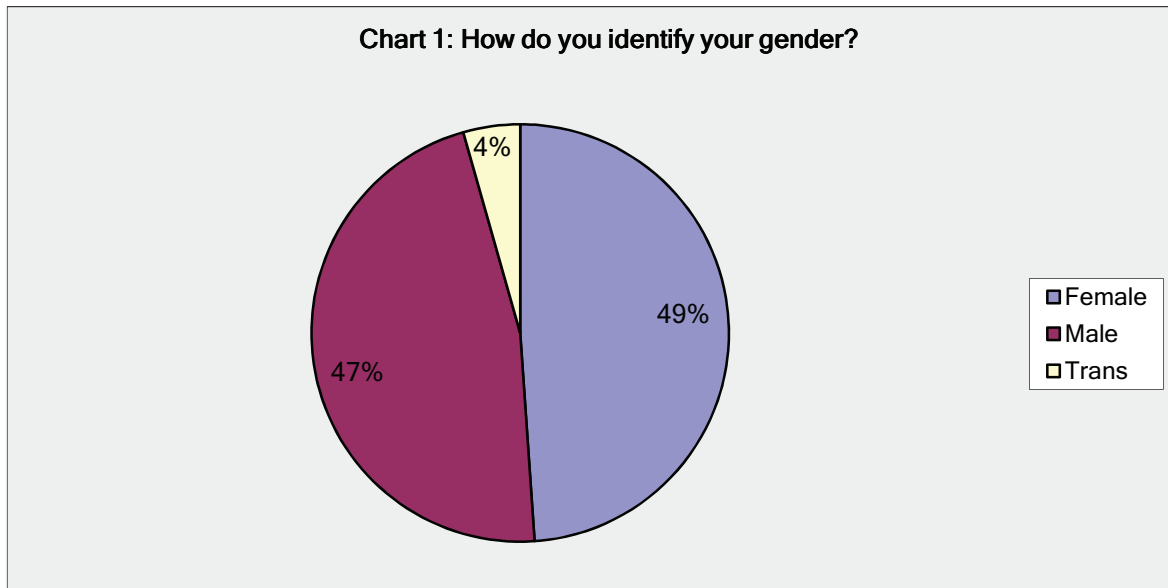
The report contains a variety of expressed views and opinions, particularly regarding homosexuality. During the course of the research, however, there was some concern from stakeholders that participants would, given general awareness of homophobia, try to give the 'right' answers to questions (as opposed to 'honest' answers to questions), or that they only chose to participate because they were broadly opposed to homophobia. This might be true to a certain extent within the schools involved, but the breadth of opinions gathered within youth settings suggests people were happy to 'go on record' as being opposed to homosexuality.

Overall, the research included more interviews and discussions than the target aim, and more could have been conducted, as there were willing potential participants, had time and resources allowed. This suggests that people are willing to talk about these issues, whether or not they support or 'agree' with LGBT equality. Whilst necessarily limited in its size, the project aimed to contribute to developing deeper understanding about barriers and facilitators to tackling these issues locally, and potentially nationally.

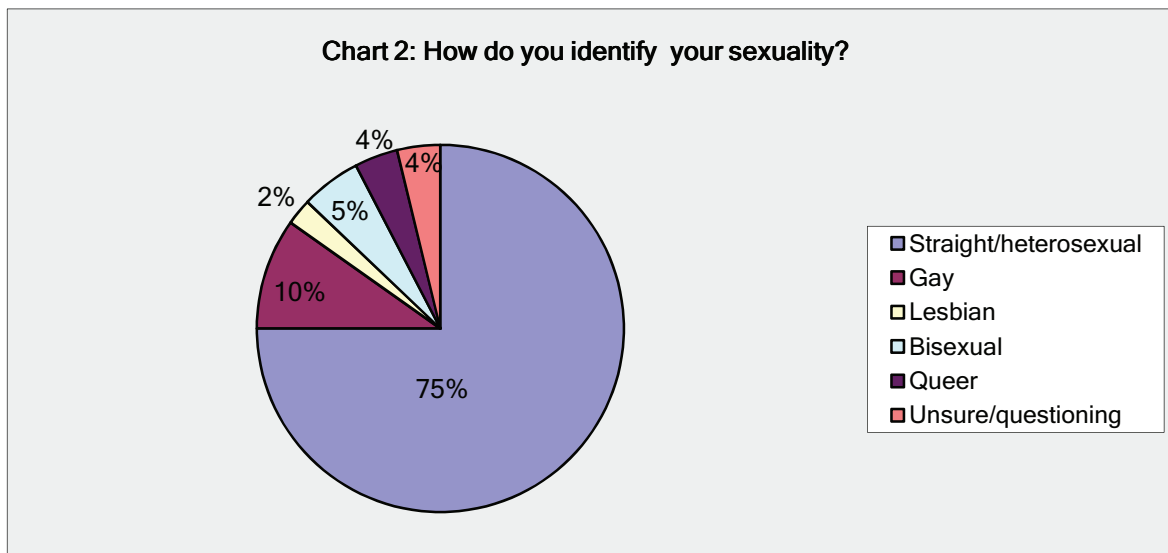
3. Results: Survey of young people

The respondents

In total, 146 young people responded to this questionnaire. They ranged in age from 13 to 21, but the majority were 15-16 years old. As Chart 1 reveals, the gender mix of respondents was broadly even, with 49% of respondents identifying themselves as female and 47% male. An additional 4% described themselves as trans.



In terms of sexuality (see Chart 2), three-quarters (75%) of the respondents identified their sexuality as being straight/heterosexual, 10% as gay, 5% as bisexual, 4% as queer, 4% as unsure/questioning and 2% as lesbian.

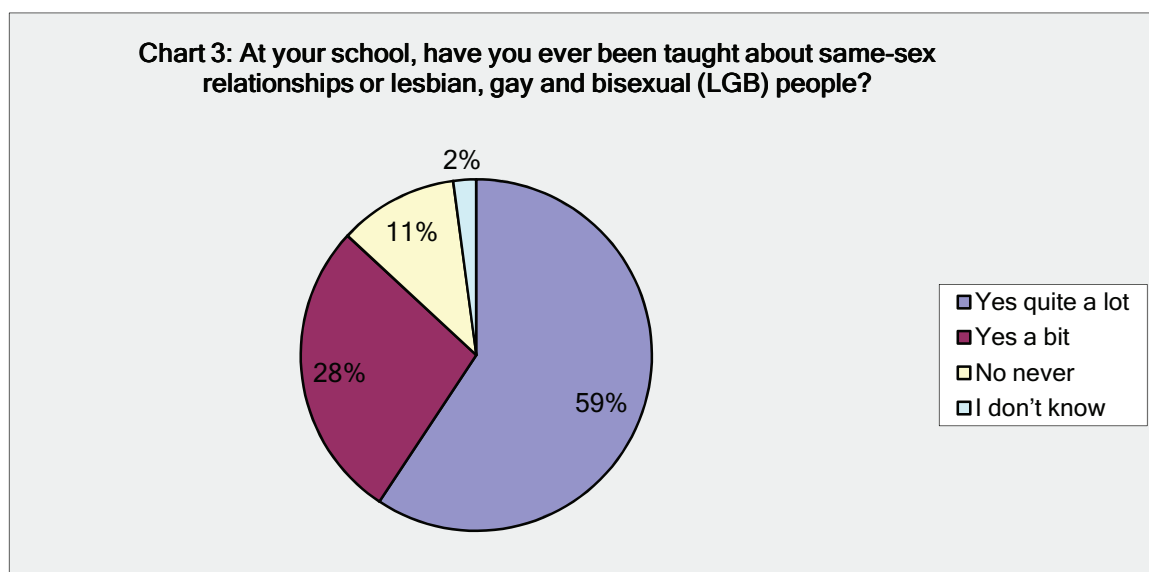


The vast majority of young people who responded lived in Sheffield (122). Other home locations identified by respondents included Rotherham, Doncaster and Stocksbridge. A clear majority (nearly two thirds) attended one of two secondary schools in Sheffield. The remaining 21% of respondents who provided their school name, attended one of 21 other secondary schools (in frequencies ranging from 1 to 3 respondents per school). This diversity included both private and faith schools, but it is important to acknowledge that the

vast majority of respondents came from two Sheffield schools, one of which is known for its 'good practice' in the area of PSHE, and same-sex relationships in particular, so the extent to which these results can be generalised across Sheffield or beyond is very limited. The potentially more positive picture that these results portray, for instance, was not corroborated in the face-to-face methods with young people from a range of other schools and settings.

School coverage and teaching about LGBT issues

As Chart 3 shows, the vast majority of respondents said they had been taught either 'quite a lot' (59%) or at least 'a bit' about same-sex relationships or lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Nevertheless, there were still a sizeable minority, over a tenth of respondents (11%), who said they had been taught nothing at all.



For those who said they had been taught about same-sex relationships or lesbian, gay and bisexual people (see Table 2), PSHE was overwhelmingly the most likely means of having done so in school; 94% reported that they had covered such content in their PSHE lessons. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) was over five times less likely than PSHE to teach about same-sex relationships or LGB people, but this still accounted for the second most likely way of young people being taught about these issues at school. Thereafter the results suggest a fragmented picture regarding provision, with no other single way of being taught accounting for more than 9% of total responses.

Table 2: How were you taught about same-sex relationships or lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people?

How taught	Response %
Within PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education)	94
Within SRE (Sex and Relationships Education)	19
By an external speaker/outside organisation coming into school	9
Within citizenship lesson	6
During a school assembly	6
Within other subject lessons	5
Other	3
As part of SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) teaching	2

Chart 4 reveals that over half of respondents (58%) stated that they had been taught about same-sex relationships or LGB people across more than one Key Stage (KS). However, the rest said that being taught about same-sex relationships or LGB people had been limited in some way, with 13% stating that it was confined to just KS3 and 28% to only KS4.

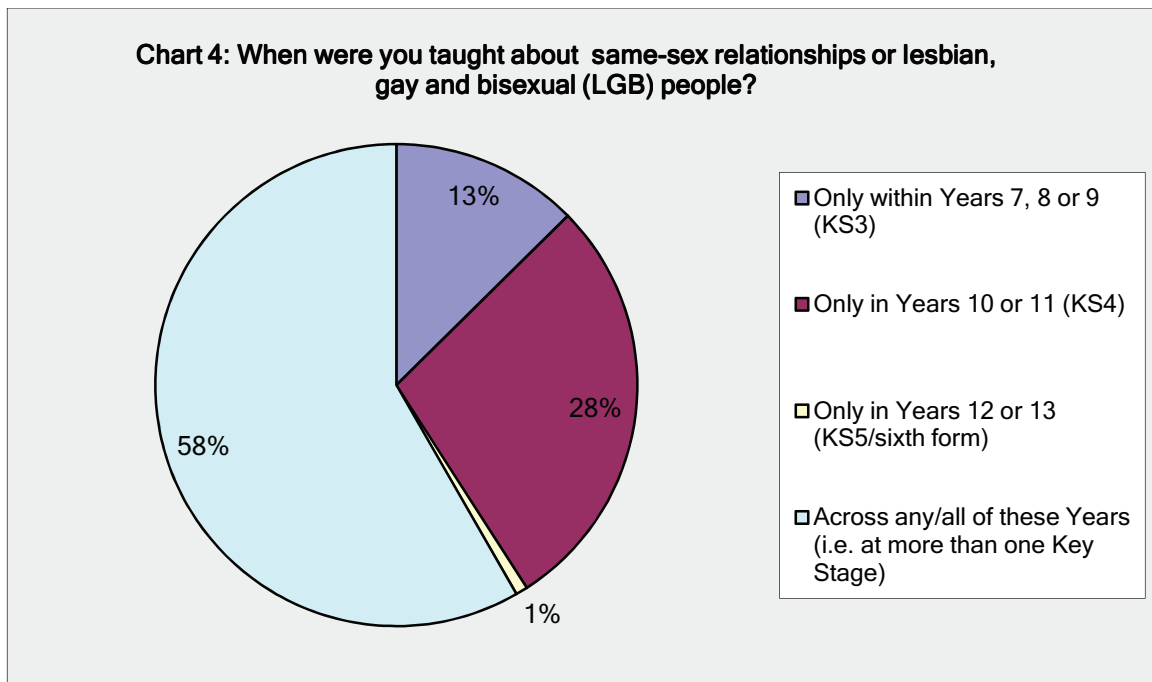


Chart 5 illustrates that respondents were less likely to have been taught about gender identity issues or transgender people than about same-sex relationships or LGB people. Only a quarter of respondents suggested they had been taught 'quite a lot' (25%) about gender identity issues or transgender people and 42% 'a bit'. A quarter of respondents (25%) reported never having been taught about gender identity issues or transgender people.

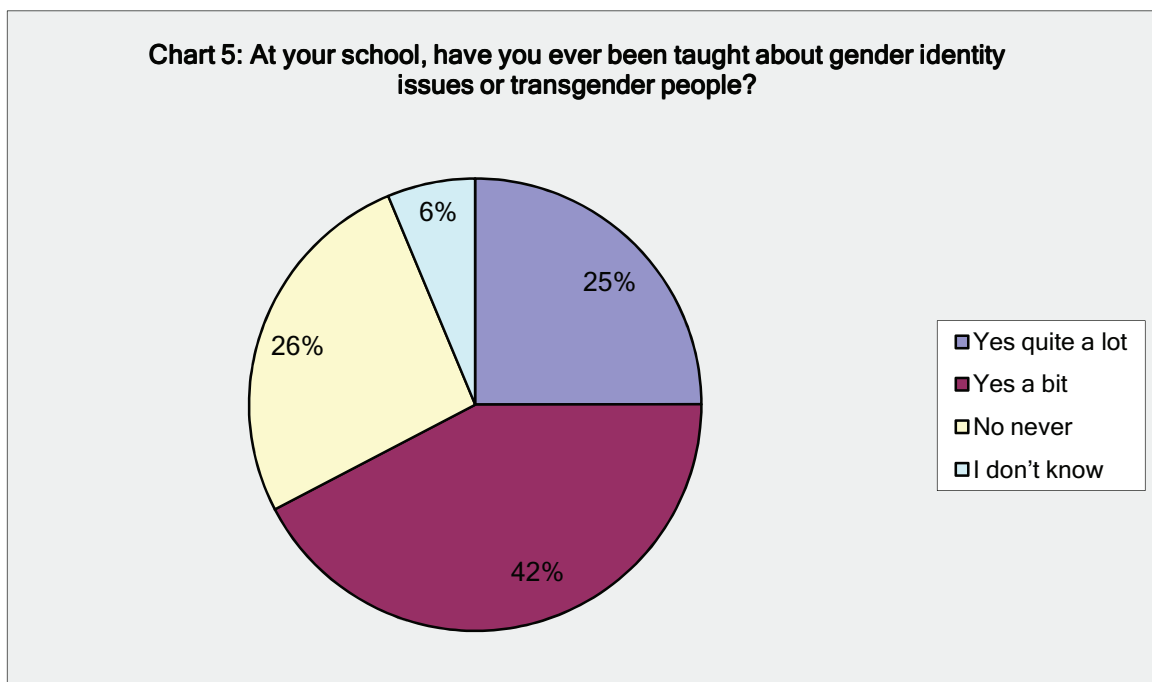


Table 3 shows that of those respondents who claimed to have been taught about gender identity issues or transgender people, 93% reported this was done through PSHE with a substantially lower proportion (18%) identifying SRE as a further source. However, education on gender identity issues or transgender people was seldom taught through other means, such as assemblies (5%), Citizenship lessons (5%), external speakers/organisations (4%), SEAL (1%) or other subject lessons (1%).

Table 3: How were you taught about gender identity issues or transgender people?

How taught	Response %
Within PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education)	93
Within SRE (Sex and Relationships Education)	18
Within citizenship lessons	5
During a school assembly	5
By an external speaker/outside organisation coming into school	4
Within other subject lessons	1
As part of SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) teaching	1
Other	1

The majority (see Chart 6) of the respondents who stated that they had been taught about gender identity issues or transgender people thought this had been confined to just KS4. However, only marginally less (44%) said they had been taught about gender identity issues or transgender people across more than one KS. Only 8% felt that they had being taught about these issues just in KS3.

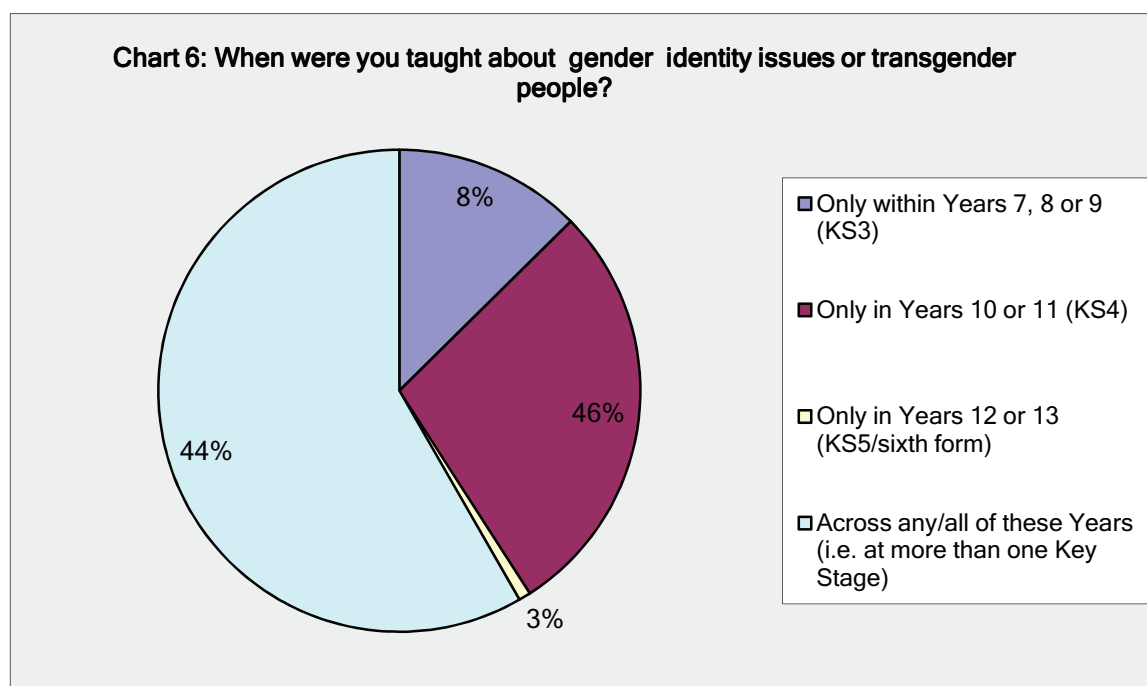


Chart 7 reveals that most respondents had been taught either 'quite a lot' (38%) or 'a bit' about same-sex relationships in SRE. However, 13% had been taught nothing about same-sex relationships in SRE. Notably, a tenth of respondents claimed to have never experienced any SRE at all, and 4% did not know.

Chart 7: At your school, has the SRE (Sex and Relationships Education) you've been taught contained any information about same-sex relationships?

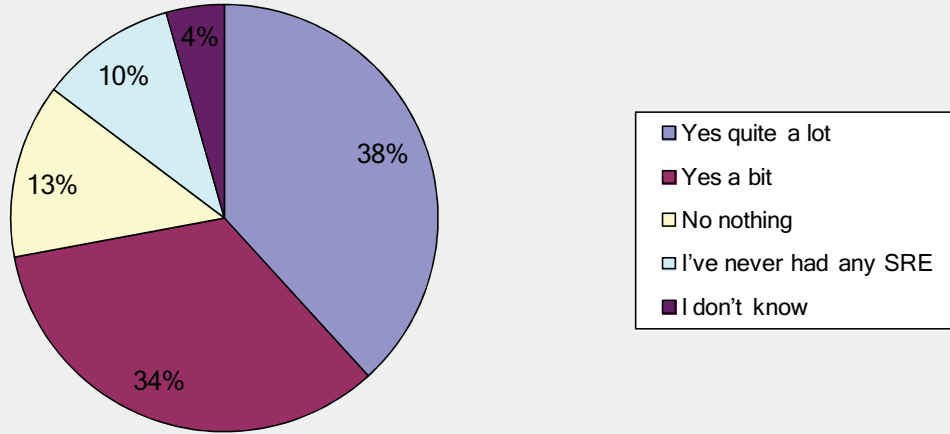
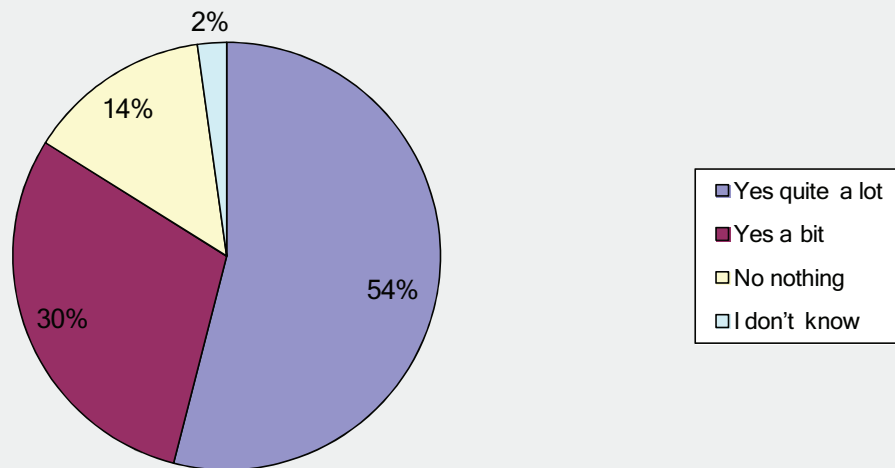


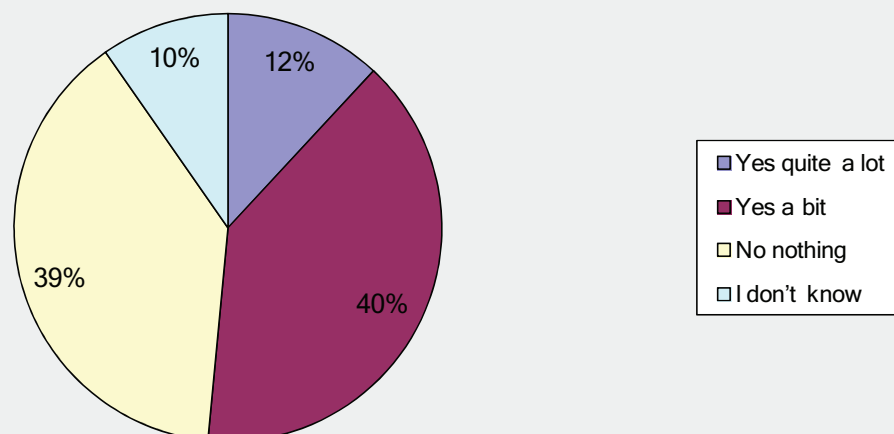
Chart 8 reveals that over half (54%) of the respondents had been taught about homophobia 'quite a lot' with a further 30% stating they had been taught about it 'a bit'. However, a significant minority (14%) could not recall being taught anything about homophobia whilst at school.

Chart 8: At your school, have you ever been taught anything about homophobia (which means to dislike or fear someone who is lesbian, gay or bisexual)?



As outlined in Chart 9, just over one in ten (12%) respondents claimed to have been taught 'quite a bit' about transphobia with a far greater proportion (40%) reporting they had been taught 'a bit'. Nevertheless, more than a third (39%) of respondents revealed they had been taught 'nothing'.

Chart 9: At your school, have you ever been taught anything about transphobia (which means to dislike or fear someone who is transgender)?



Regarding specific organisations and events, Table 4 reveals that over two-thirds of respondents had been told about the following events/organisations by either a teacher or other adult at school: Stonewall (73%), LGBT history month (69%) and International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) (67%). Just under a third said that a teacher or other adult at school had notified them about the Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF) (30%), and just under a fifth with regards to the Sheffield LGBT Education Champions Charter (20%). Finally, 4% reported being informed about Terence Higgins Trust (THT).

Table 4: At school, have you ever been told by a teacher or other adult about any of the following events/organisations?

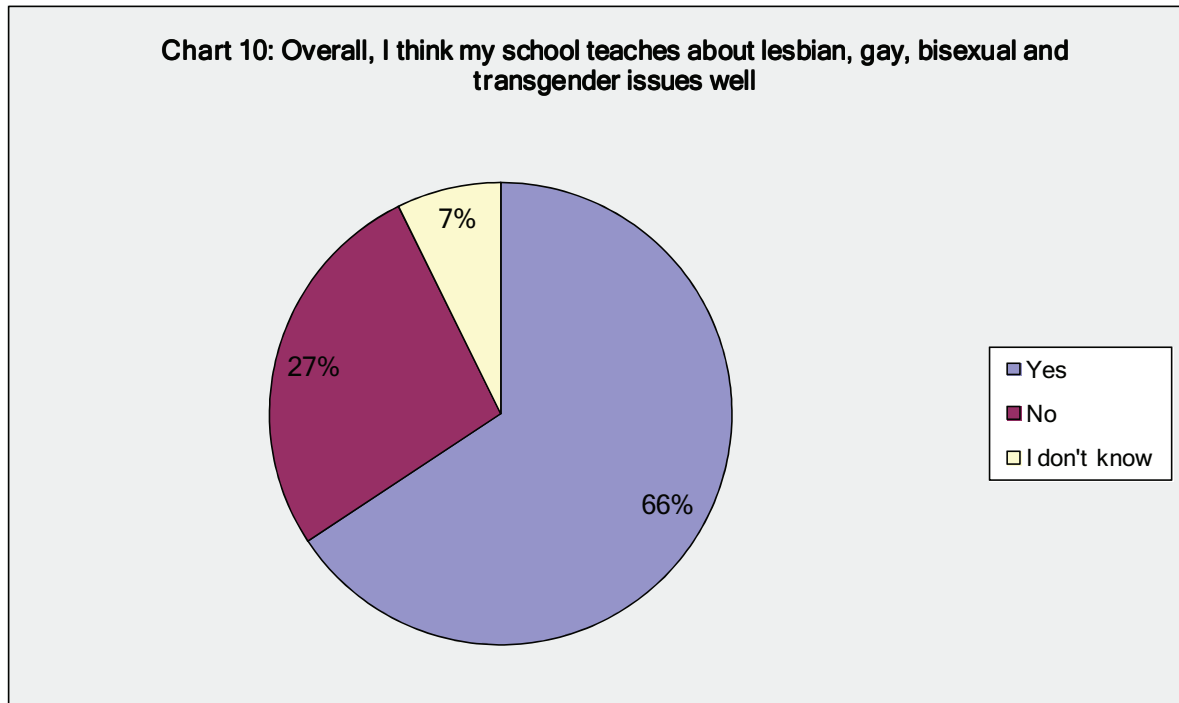
Event/organisation	Response %
Stonewall	73
LGBT history month	69
IDAHO (International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia)	67
LGF (Lesbian and Gay Foundation)	30
Sheffield LGBT Education Champions Charter	20
THT (Terence Higgins Trust)	4

As Table 5 suggests, respondents' awareness of the following organisations either through school or elsewhere was highly variable. Nearly three quarters of respondents (71%) knew of Fruitbowl, and over a third had heard of the recent rugby league match between Sheffield Eagles and Widnes Vikings that promoted awareness about homophobia. Around a quarter had been aware of the Sheffield Gay Icons project (26%) and GLOBAL (24%). Young people were less likely to be aware of the Side by Side initiative (20%), and just over a tenth recognised Off the Scene (12%).

Table 5: Either in school or out of school, have you ever heard about any of the following events/organisations?

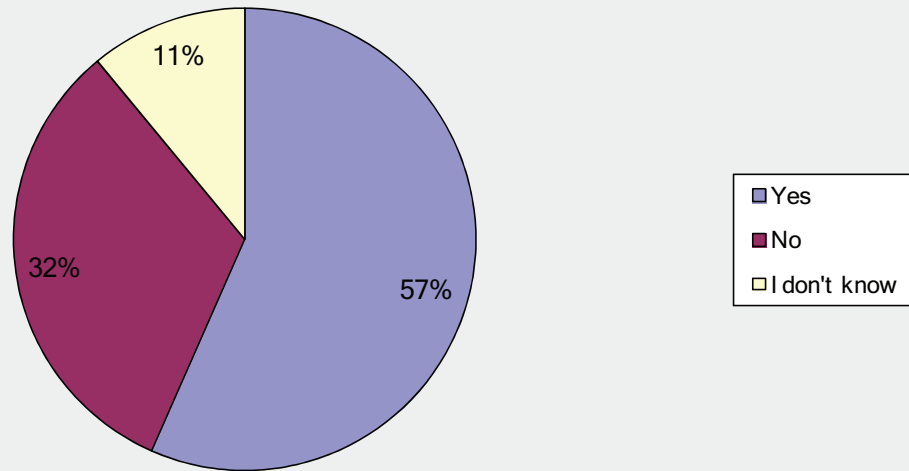
Event/organisation	Response %
Fruitbowl (youth group for LGBT under 18s)	71
The recent rugby league match (during LGBT history month) when Sheffield Eagles played Widnes Vikings wearing shirts saying 'Homophobia: Tackle it'	35
Sheffield Gay Icons Project	26
GLOBAL (Gay, Lesbian and Others Becoming Active Leaders)	24
Side by Side (peer education challenging homophobia in schools)	20
Off the Scene (young adult group for LGBT people aged 18-25)	12

As depicted in Chart 10, two-thirds of respondents (66%) felt that overall their school taught about LGBT issues well. However, just over a quarter (27%) stated that they did not think overall their school taught about LGBT issues well.



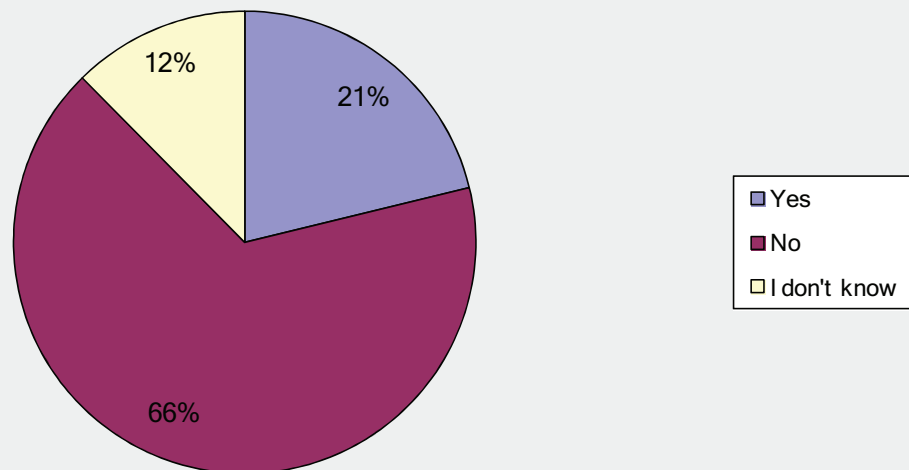
Over half of respondents (57%) felt they had been taught enough about LGBT issues at school, with just under a third (32%) believing they had been taught insufficiently (see Chart 11).

Chart 11: I think I've been taught enough about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues at school



A similar question revealed that two-thirds (66%) of young people did not think they had been taught too much about LGBT issues at school, while just over a fifth (21%) felt that they had (see Chart 12). In summary, 66% felt that their school taught about LGBT issues well, but a smaller proportion felt that it was enough (57%); 21% thought that they had been taught 'too much'.

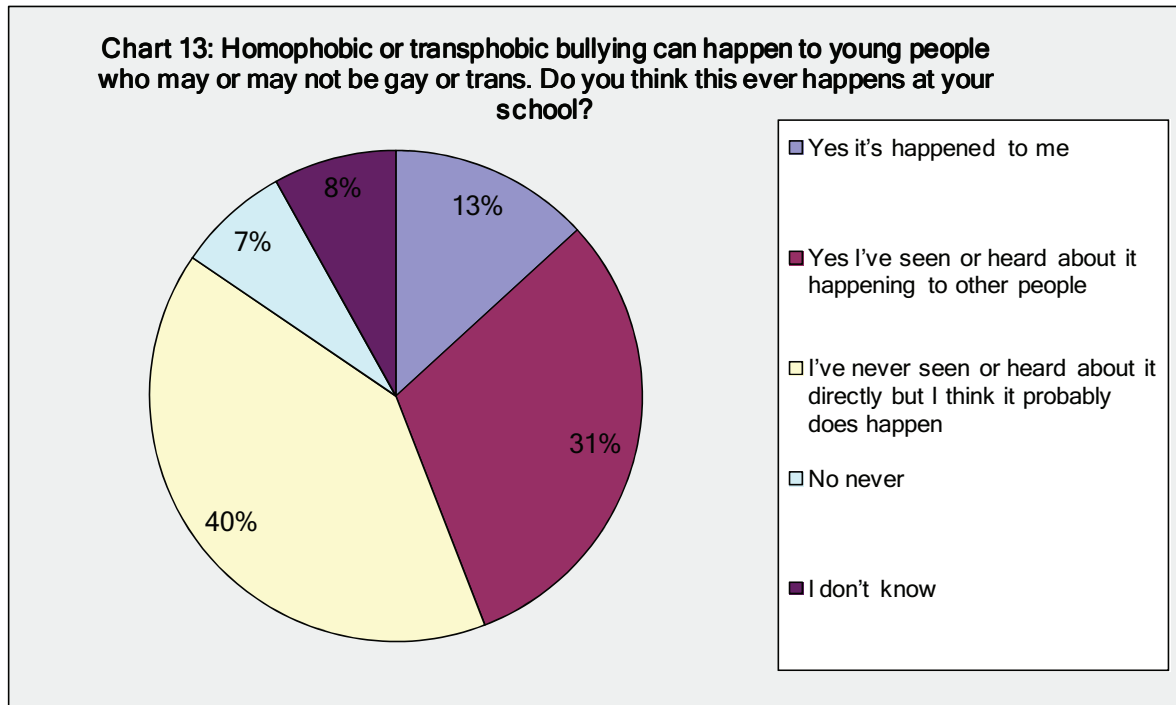
Chart 12: I think I've been taught too much about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues at school



Discrimination, bullying and language use

As revealed in Chart 13, only 7% of respondents said that they did not feel anything resembling homophobic or transphobic bullying had occurred during their time at school. In

comparison, over a tenth (13%) directly encountered homophobic or transphobic bullying, with just under a third (31%) revealing they had seen or heard about it happening to other people whilst at school. The most frequently held view (40%) from respondents was that although they had never directly seen or heard about homophobic or transphobic bullying they suspected it probably happened at school.



Just under half of respondents felt that their school dealt with homophobic and/or transphobic bullying well (47%). In contrast, just over a fifth of respondents felt that their school did not deal with homophobic and/or transphobic bullying well. A large number, just under a third (30%), were unsure (see Chart 14).

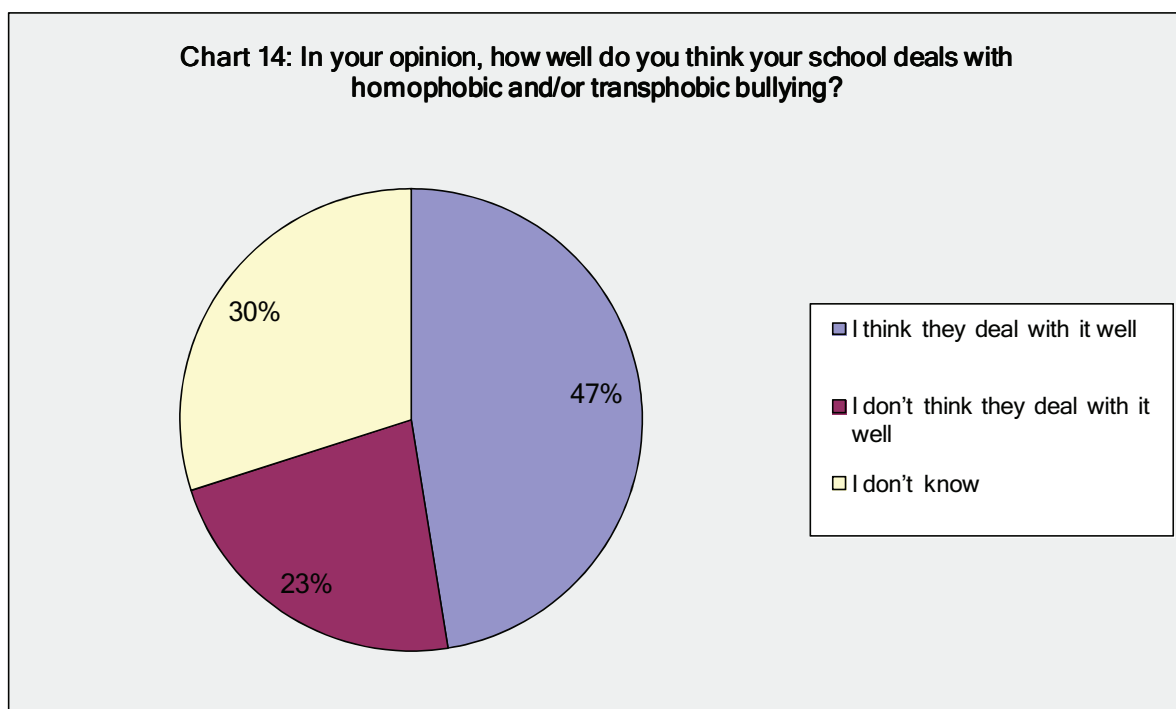
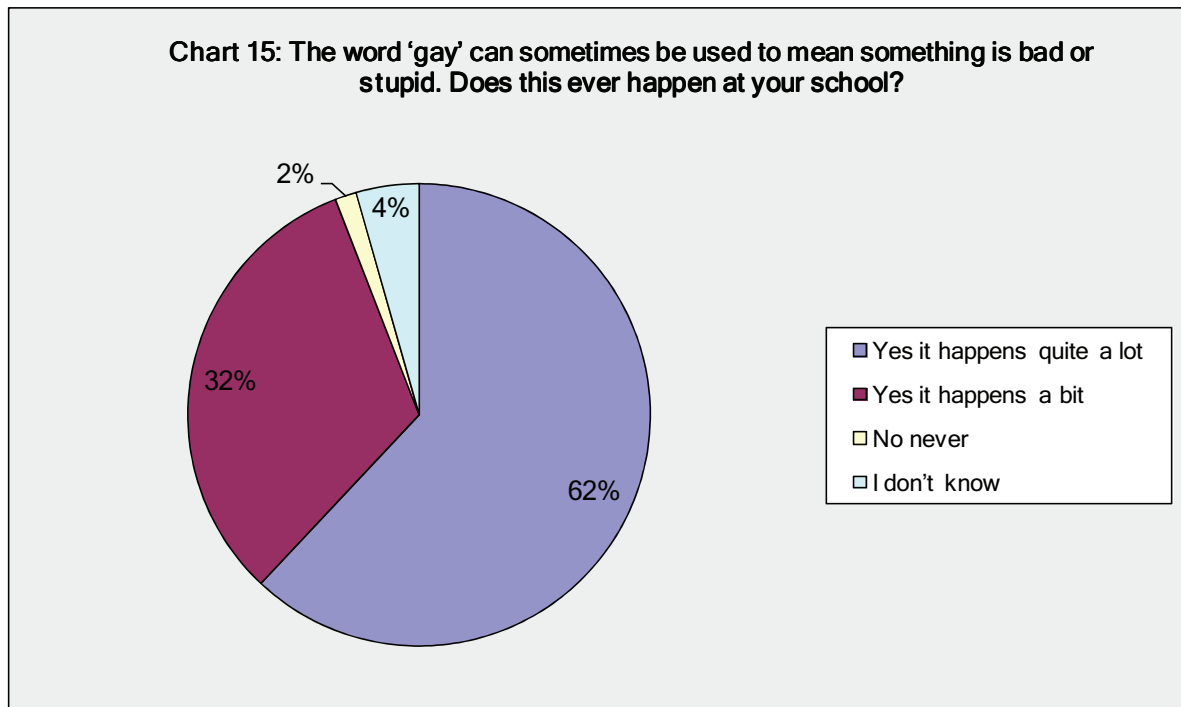


Chart 15 reveals common usage of the word 'gay' to mean something is bad or stupid. Just 2% of respondents stated that they had never overheard the word 'gay' being used in this manner. In contrast, nearly two-thirds (62%) revealed such usage happens 'quite a lot', with a further 32% saying it happens 'a bit'.



Signposting and supporting young people

Chart 16 identifies that respondents were as likely to talk to a teacher (40%) as a friend (40%) in relation to homosexuality or transgender issues. 7% stated that they would be more inclined to seek out 'someone else at school' and a further 13% said that they 'wouldn't know who to talk to'.

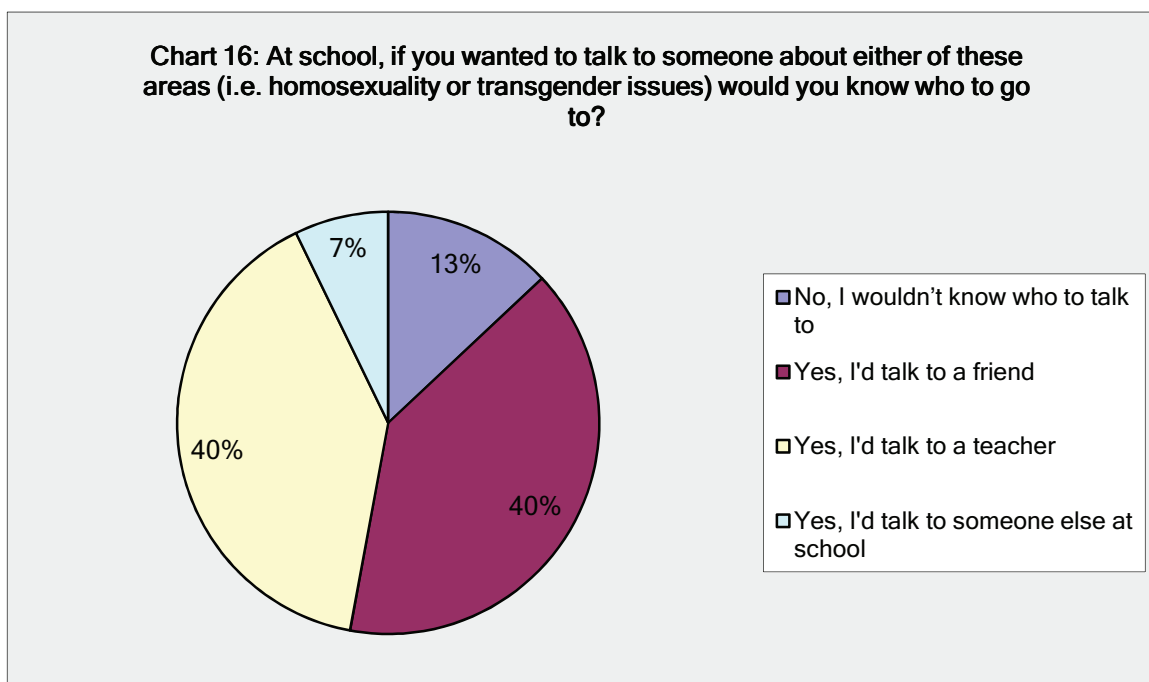
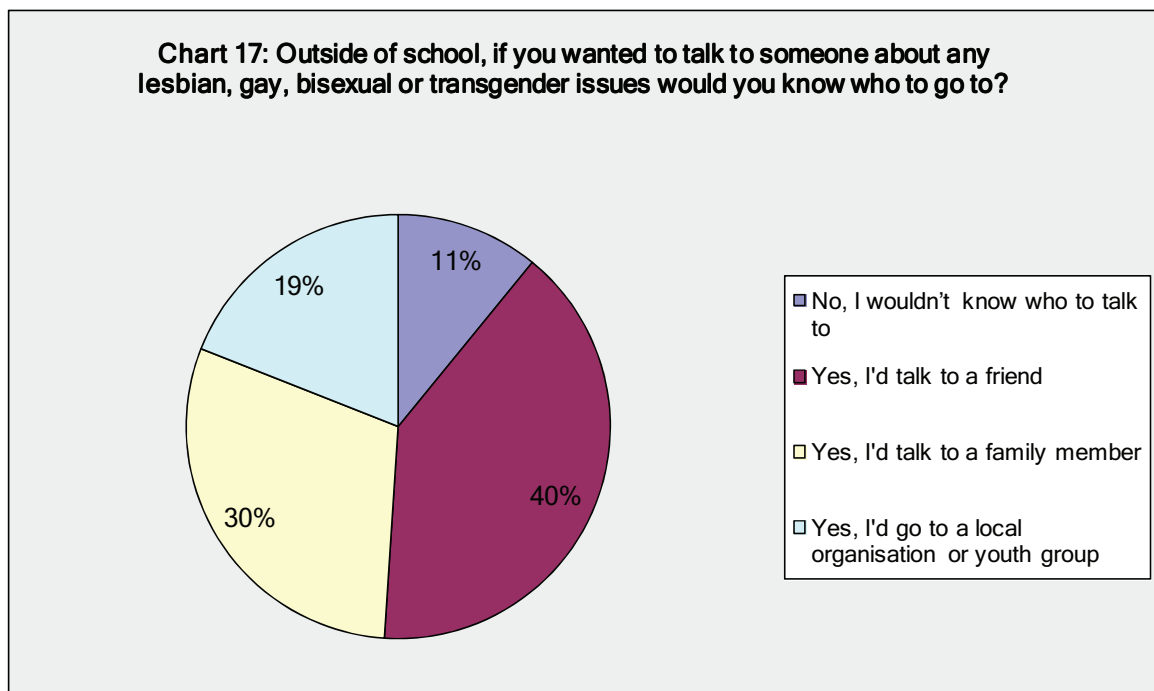


Chart 17 illustrates that outside of a school setting, young people would be most inclined to talk to a friend (40%), followed by a family member (30%), about any LGBT issues. Thereafter, just under a fifth (19%) said that they would seek out a local organisation or youth group, with over a tenth (11%) stating that they would not know who to approach in relation to LGBT issues outside of school.



In total, 85% of respondents said they had never accessed any local youth groups in order to discuss any LGBT related issues.

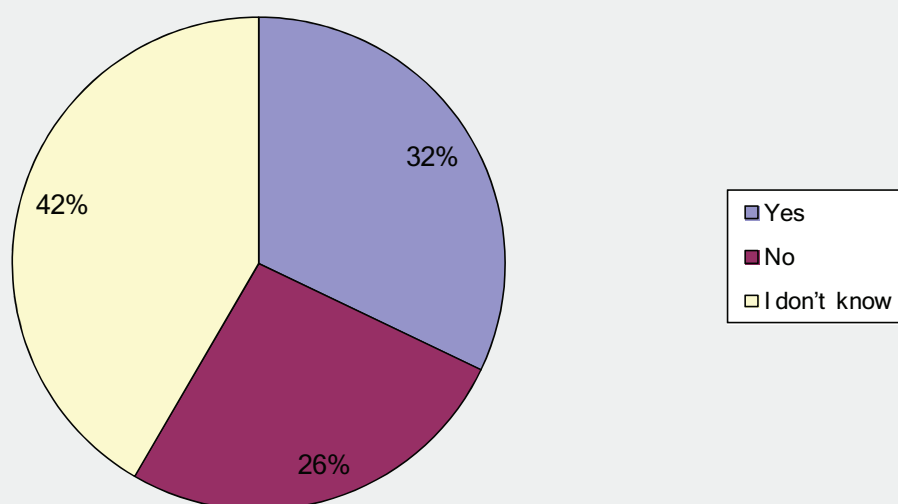
When invited to state specifically where they would access such youth groups there were a total of 18 responses, which included Fruitbowl, the Rotherham LGBT group, the Thrybergh Youth Centre, and the Maynell Youth Centre. This suggests the use of mainstream (locality-based) youth provision to support LGBT issues in addition to specialist services.

When asked, 18% of respondents said that they had used the internet or any mobile phone based information or support to find out or talk about any LGBT issues. A similar distribution of respondents (15%) had used the internet or any social networking sites to meet or communicate with other young people in relation to LGBT issues. As only 25% of the sample described themselves as not heterosexual in some way (Chart 2), this would indicate that use of the Internet for such purposes amongst LGB respondents was proportionally far higher.

Thinking about the future: improvements and support needs

Chart 18 shows that the largest proportion of respondents (42%) were unsure whether their school could improve how they dealt with homophobic and/or transphobic bullying. Just under a third (32%), however, felt it could be improved, whilst just over a quarter (26%) felt there was no scope for improvement.

Chart 18: In your opinion, do you think it could be improved in any way?



As part of the survey, the young people were invited to provide open comments as to how they felt their schools could improve dealing with homophobic and/or transphobic bullying. In all, 11 comments related to enhancing school delivery mechanisms and/or the curriculum itself in some way to more effectively deal with homophobic and/or transphobic bullying. Among the more specific suggestions raised was the need to include more assemblies and to teach pupils about the issues from an earlier stage of schooling:

“At least have more assemblies and presentations about this stuff” (Survey respondent 42)

“By learning about these things earlier in school so they are used to it and don't bully people”
(Survey respondent 20)

“Teaching younger people like 7, 8, 9 what homophobia is and helping people to see past it and help understand the gay community” (Survey respondent 36)

Another comment outlined the need to make teaching about homophobic and/or transphobic bullying a compulsory part of the curriculum:

“Schools should have to include this in the curriculum” (Survey respondent 35)

One young person cautioned that LGB issues should not be isolated to single subject areas such as PSHE, but that they should instead be used to form an integrated and coherent package:

“LGB issues should be discussed/tackled in all subject/aspects of school life not just PSHE”
(Survey respondent 39)

Others wrote in a more general way about the need to increase awareness levels and to challenge prejudices around issues such as homophobia:

“Trying to make the bullies understand WHY they shouldn't be homophobic and making them realise we're still human and it doesn't matter if we're gay. I very much doubt they'd

say 'don't rescue me' if they were drowning and the lifeguard was gay" (Survey respondent 9, participant's emphasis)

Five young people specifically mentioned the need to utilise outside agencies more and/or create LGBT groups/clubs that could run within school:

"The staff from the youth centre have taught us about language, they should come in [to school] and work with us" (Survey respondent 8)

"I think that they could have LGBT groups or clubs after school" (Survey respondent 21)

A further two comments suggest that schools could themselves do more to act as champions to LGBT rights, either through generally employing more LGBT staff or by appointing a member of staff to champion LGBT/homophobia related issues:

"More powers should be given... and a [non-religious] teacher should be placed to be the representative of LGBT, homophobia issues etc" (Survey respondent 33)

"Being more open about it so it is not seen as something unusual or funny. Also, employing more LGBT teachers would help since they could play the part of being positive role models so pupils can see that there's nothing strange about being LGBT" (Survey respondent 34)

Eight comments urged schools to take homophobic and transphobic bullying more seriously and to take appropriate punitive action (including exclusion if necessary) against those found to be responsible:

"I think that they should use more discipline and not let things go as easy" (Survey respondent 30)

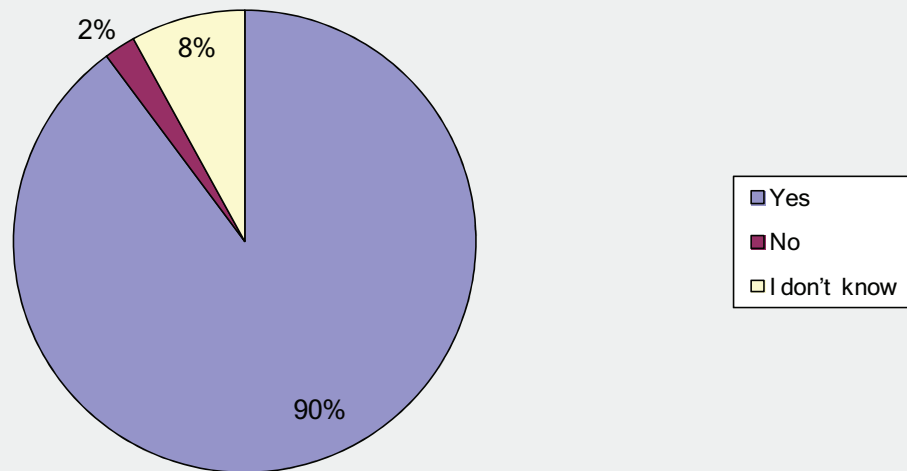
"Exclusion or even possibly permanent exclusion" (Survey respondent 29)

Three young people specifically identified a need for schools to tackle the casual use of 'gay' as a derogatory term by making it a punishable offence:

"Using the term 'gay' in a derogatory way should be punishable in the same way using racist language is" (Survey respondent 31)

Chart 19 shows that the overwhelming majority of young people (90%), whether gay or not, felt that learning about LGBT issues was important, in comparison to just 2% who did not.

Chart 19: Do you think it is important to learn about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues?



Of relevance to thinking about future developments, in the final survey question young people were invited to add any other comments about any of the issues raised. Four respondents specifically praised either the amount or quality of the content they received in relation to homophobia:

"I learnt a lot about this topic, my teacher is very open about this topic. We get told about all the different places we can go if we need to go anywhere" (Survey respondent 14)

"I think this [area] has been very educational and has told me more about bi, lesbian and gay people" (Survey respondent 9)

By way of contrast, others felt LGBT related issues remained an unspoken taboo subject at school, and that whilst homophobia was not necessarily overtly encountered, the lack of formal discussion facilitated an insidious underlying stereotyping and homophobia:

"Overall, LGBT issues are pretty much not talked about at all at my school (perhaps because it is [a private school]) but I think that facilitates for homophobia to happen and nobody to question it. For example, if you were to ask someone if they were homophobic they'd say 'no, I love gay people' before going on to stereotype all gay men as camp lady boys who read Vogue when that probably isn't what they're all like" (Survey respondent 17)

"People don't understand gay people and are generally homophobic at my school" (Survey respondent 18)

One young person felt there had been an over-emphasis on LGBT issues that was to the detriment of learning about other areas of PSHE:

"I think that sometimes schools can become a bit too focused on LGBT and don't focus on other subjects like drugs and sex" (Survey respondent 5)

Finally, two young people lamented the wider social culture of not taking young people's sexual identity seriously by suggesting if they did not view themselves as heterosexual it was likely to be dismissed because they were 'young' and/or 'confused':

“If you are young and you think that you are not straight then people may say that you might just be confused” (Survey respondent 13)

“I hate how you can own up to your friends more than your parents because your parents can sometimes have doubts and say ‘Well you’re just a teenager, you’re probably confused’ and also when some of your friends or other people at school or outside school say ‘He/she’s just saying that he/she’s gay because they want attention and want to be different’” (Survey respondent 12)

Many of the above issues were explored in further detail within the face-to-face research methods, explored within the next chapter.

4. Findings: Interviews with young people

This chapter is based on data from eight in-depth group discussions with young people aged 11-20 years old, which took place in school and youth work settings. In total, 65 individuals participated, involving slightly more young men than women.

The chapter is structured on the basis of over-arching themes which form the headings also used within other chapters. Specific themes and issues within these are denoted by sub-headings. Illustrative quotes from a range of participants involved in different groups are included throughout.

School coverage and teaching about LGBT issues

Inclusion within the formal curriculum

In general, if issues related to being lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans were raised within school this tended to be within PSHE lessons. Sometimes this focussed on gay men rather than lesbian, bisexual or trans groups. The majority of young people had not experienced any substantial coverage, although this varied between schools. Where PSHE was taught using drop-down days, young people commented that this meant that any specific issues covered were only “touched on” and could feel “rushed” (e.g. one hour within one day, once a year). This supports evidence concerning PSHE delivery more generally (Formby et al, 2011; Hirst et al, 2006; Ofsted, 2005, 2010). This was said not to contribute to learning or understanding, particularly as there tended to be low attendance on these days. Moreover, they did not always feel they could ask questions. The most comprehensive example of inclusion of LGB issues in PSHE explicitly included discussion of homophobic bullying. In this school, however, pupils still felt that “most” teachers (outside PSHE) would not and did not mention the subject area. Elsewhere, same-sex relationships had been covered within PSHE in relation to ‘different families’, explicitly talking about family structures that could include “two mums” or “two dads”. LGBT-related issues were sometimes covered within English or Religious Education (RE) but these tended to be ‘one-off’ isolated mentions rather than fully embedded or included within any curricula. None of the participants said they had ever been taught anything which mentioned IDAHO or LGBT history month specifically, though sometimes people’s sexuality was mentioned “in passing”, such as the war poet Wilfred Owen. Issues about gender identity had never been raised/taught to any participants, and there appeared to be very little understanding about trans identities/experiences.

Some participants felt that LGBT issues were assumed not to be relevant to the majority of pupils by schools and teachers which was said to explain their absence from the curriculum. One group generally agreed that it was widely perceived to be a “taboo subject” within school. Another group suggested that schools “always” assumed - and worked on the basis - that everyone is heterosexual, because they do not “stop to think”. Similarly, in another group, one participant commented:

“Teachers present the norm anyway in the way that they word things” (Youth group 4 member)

Overall, there was general support for talking about these issues at school, with young people expressing curiosity, interest and/or uncertainty about the area. It was suggested that it could be included more, for example as a good subject for “debates” in English. Some also suggested that explicitly talking about it more could reduce incidences of homophobic bullying by “explaining things”, generating empathy, and making people “think twice” about being homophobic. They also thought that greater discussion could increase general ‘comfort’ with the subject, and make it easier for people to ‘come out’ in the long-run. Other

young people, however, felt that this area was talked about “enough” and that “much more” and it could get “boring”. It was noticeable that this was in a setting where they had had some input on this area, rather than none. A small minority of participants in the research felt that this subject should not be discussed at school. One young man, for example, said it was not appropriate for PSHE to “try change my mind” about his (negative) views on homosexuality; he felt that being gay was “their choice” but that it was not something that “needs to be discussed”. Other members of the same group disagreed and appeared shocked at what they said was his homophobia.

One issue that emerged was where inclusion of LGBT matters within the curriculum was felt to be tokenistic rather than facilitating any detailed discussion. Some young people, for instance, had the impression that their school raised it in order to say that they had, rather than to have any meaningful in-depth dialogue; an example given was where a teacher had refused to answer a question. Another participant also said that they thought they would get detention for saying they did not feel homosexuality was ‘right’, rather than being given time to discuss why they felt this way (and perhaps what factors might begin to change their opinion). This links to some staff views expressed within the research (see Chapter 5) about the best ways to tackle ‘disapproval’ or homophobia, i.e. through silencing/disciplining beliefs, or challenging them through discussion. Some young people explicitly said that they thought “ignorance” should be challenged by allowing people to discuss “both sides of the argument”, which they felt could best be done in PSHE.

On the whole, there was a clear contrast between the informal visibility of homosexuality among young people, albeit potentially unsupportive, and the formal invisibility within the curriculum. In other words, young people summarised how homosexuality was something that young people talked about, but not teachers:

“People talk about it a lot, students do... students do take the mick out of people about that”
(Youth group 2 member)

In relation to experiences of SRE specifically, this subject area was perceived as on the whole aimed at heterosexual pupils and/or focussed on contraception and pregnancy prevention, as observed elsewhere (Alldred and David, 2007; Formby, 2011a; Forrest et al, 2004; Ingham and Hirst, 2010; Martinez and Emmerson, 2008). Whilst some young people thought this heterosexual focus was understandable and appropriate, this was not necessarily helpful for LGB pupils:

“What I find with that when it comes to sex education, you don’t do the education you need... we haven’t done anything literally... about other sexualities other than being straight... you need to learn all of this when you’re earlier (sic) so when you grow up you’re not closed-minded and you can make a proper decision” (Youth group 1 member)

Others commented that where same-sex relationships were raised within SRE, this was either in relation to HIV/AIDS and/or only very briefly:

“[they tell us] gay people have sex as well and then they move on” (Youth group 5 member)

More general comments on SRE were that it was “too late” by Year 9 anyway, also supporting much other research on SRE (e.g. see Blake, 2008; UK Youth Parliament, 2007).

Impact of broader social views

Clearly, there are links between attitudes and values learnt and/or expressed within school, and those circulating in wider society. Some participants felt that there was “no

understanding” about LGBT issues among their peers, which was related to more widespread views that same-sex relationships are ‘wrong’ or “not natural”. For these young people, homophobia was not challenged within their school environment, or their broader social life. Some argued that there needed to be familiarity with a subject matter before there was ‘acceptance’ or ‘understanding’. To a certain extent, this was supported elsewhere where there were openly gay pupils within school that to a certain extent contributed to an environment that was largely unconcerned about gay relationships among young people or staff. Elsewhere, where this was not the case, young people appeared to hold (commonly circulating) stereotypical beliefs about homosexuality (and gay men in particular) which remained unchallenged within their school environment:

“They just like act different ‘coz sometimes they sound gay and things like that” (Youth group 3 member)

Some young people went beyond discussion of stereotypes, and demonstrated strong beliefs that same-sex relationships were “weird”, “disgusting” and/or not how things are “supposed to be”. These young people often felt sure that they had never met a gay person.

One (LGB) group also discussed the generally ‘extreme’ gay characters often on television. Whilst these were not thought to effectively challenge stereotypes, there was also a feeling that visibility at all was, or would be, a positive step forward:

“Opening people’s eyes that being gay isn’t wrong and that there [are] gay people around you and that you shouldn’t be scared of them” (Youth group 4 member)

Similarly, one group felt that they had learnt more as they got older and naturally began to meet and get to know more gay people. Most of this group reported having lesbian or gay colleagues, friends or family, which appeared to influence their views and resulted in discussion about how ‘acceptable’ or ‘easy’ it now is to be openly gay in society. However, they tied this back to (lack of) religion, culture, upbringing and friendship networks, acknowledging that although they felt “you are who you are” they did not think everyone would feel the same way as them towards gay people. Some girls, in particular, felt that girls were generally more “accepting” than boys, though there was not agreement on this point. There was more of a consensus of opinion that women were more likely to ‘accept’ lesbians and gay men, whereas men were more likely to only ‘accept’ gay women. This was said (by young women) to relate to greater insecurities and/or ability to talk about emotions among young men. In another group, there was a perception that homophobic bullying was more likely to be perpetrated by “younger” year groups, which may also link lack of ‘acceptance’ to immaturity, with the implication that homophobia could reduce as young people mature:

“There’s that block, I’d say between about Year 6 and Year 8 when you’re just closed-minded, you’re basically regurgitating what you hear around you and if what you hear around you is homophobic then that’s what you’re going to be spreading” (Youth group 1 member)

Use and impact of local support agencies

Generally, external visitors coming into school to discuss sexuality (which only happened in the minority of schools) were described as “good”. Some of the young people interviewed had experienced ‘Side by Side’, the drama-based peer education programme delivered in Sheffield by the Sheena Amos Youth Trust (though they did not necessarily know it as such). These sessions (an assembly followed by a workshop delivered within PSHE) were clearly memorable to the majority of pupils. They felt the input was “good”, “interesting” and evoked more ‘excitement’ than ‘normal’ lessons looking at a board and/or listening to a teacher. They understood the underlying purpose to be about “making people understand what it

might be like [to be gay]”. Initially the play generated strong reactions from young people watching it (as it contains a kiss between two males) which was then discussed further in the workshop. Whilst this may be a good way to explore the area, it can be difficult for gay pupils present, as suggested in another group:

“I was literally sitting there going, ‘Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh God, if they find out [I’m gay] I’m dead’” (Youth group 1 member)

Support and resources for staff: what are the barriers and facilitators?

Whilst this was, perhaps understandably, not an issue young people felt able to comment on in much depth, some participants did express anger at “archaic” schools’ “disregard” for LGB pupils and/or homophobic bullying, with some teachers clearly being “closed-minded”. Faith schools were felt to be worse than non-faith schools at including LGB issues within their curricula, with some evidently teaching anti-homosexuality views. LGB group members, however, argued that they should teach about different sexualities as much as different religions.

In general, three reasons were put forward to explain schools or teachers not engaging with this subject. This included a lack of training, specifically on how to deal with homophobic bullying; fear of ‘getting it wrong’, and fear of complaints. This was largely related to parents, and to a lesser extent, local religious community members.

“I think the only reason why teachers respond the way that they do or act as uncomfortable as they do is because they don’t know enough about it... some of them it’s not that they don’t like the idea of it, it’s that they don’t understand it and they don’t want to do anything wrong”
(Youth group 4 member)

“Teachers do crumble under pressure from parents... [they are] intimidated a little too much”
(Youth group 1 member)

However, where schools were able to use specific resources within their teaching this was often praised. The Stonewall ‘Fit’ DVD was one such example where young people remembered the “life stories” of the characters portrayed in the film, suggesting that - to a certain extent - appropriate materials can compensate for teachers’ potential lack of confidence or expertise in an area.

Discrimination, bullying and language use

For the majority of participants in this study, both gay and heterosexual, hearing discriminatory views about homosexuality being voiced by young people (if not themselves) was not at all uncommon. For the most part, these were not necessarily challenged by staff within school. Some young people were also keen to make it clear that whilst they did not personally feel comfortable or ‘agree’ with same-sex relationships, this did not mean that they would “pick on” or bully any individuals who they knew to be gay.

Experiences and impact of bullying or discrimination

The majority of bullying was reported by young people identifying as LGB, although there was widespread awareness of bullying that could be interpreted as homophobic. Also, young people witnessed or experienced being bullied for being viewed as ‘different’ or assumed to be gay, or for having gay parents.

In general terms, bullying tended to be defined as more 'severe' teasing/verbal abuse about a particular subject, such as being gay, which took it "to the next level", or where there was perceived to be 'truth' behind the assumptions, i.e. calling someone gay when you thought they were was often distinguished from calling someone gay when you did not really think they were, but were using it as a 'jokey' term of offence anyway.

"There's gay, there's faggot, and then there's all the swearing words, pretty much everything you can think of" (Youth group 2 member)

Some felt that people being called gay related more to their popularity in general; if they were popular and gay it might not 'matter' to other young people, but if they were not widely liked, then it would be their sexual identity that would be most picked on.

Most of the two LGB groups had experienced negative responses or bullying related to their sexuality whilst at school. To a large extent, they expected these problems, which did not mean that they did not feel angry or find it "frustrating", "diabolical", or "annoying":

"Bullying doesn't faze me anymore because I've had to deal with it but it does get on my nerves" (Youth group 1 member)

"If I could choose to be gay or not I would choose not to be because there's too much harassment" (Youth group 1 member)

"I just don't want to have to put up with it really" (Youth group 1 member)

Whilst for some, bullying 'got on their nerves', for others it could have more serious consequences. This included mental health issues and persistent non-attendance at school with obvious implications for their educational attainment. Equally, not all bullying incidents were restricted to verbal abuse. Within one group illustrative examples were provided, including having a water bomb of urine thrown at them and having acid thrown at them in a science lesson (these were separate incidents to two different people).

A number of group members in one discussion said that they had recanted their 'admission' that they were gay because of the bullying that had ensued. One participant also noted that they had had a transgendered friend who was bullied and kept reporting it to the school "but nothing seemed to happen" and their friend subsequently left. Many of the participants in one group felt that the context within their school meant that they would not contemplate 'coming out' about their sexuality:

"You would die if you came out in our school" (Youth group 4 member)

Others in this group agreed that it would be "too much hassle" when even rumours about your sexuality or dressing differently could cause you to be "picked on":

"There was that rumour going round anyway, I thought if I did actually come out my life would be a misery" (Youth group 4 member)

Whilst feeling that it should not happen, for many who did come out and who did not subsequently retract this, there appeared to be an acceptance that 'this is the way it would be' and that bullying would continue to occur:

"I shouldn't have to take it but I'm going to" (Youth group 1 member)

“There’s going to be people out there that are going to be horrible about it, you’ve just got to learn to deal with it... it’s something that comes along with the territory... it’s the society we live in” (Youth group 1 member)

“There’s nothing that you can do about it to make people understand, to make people accept it... it’ll take time, lots of time... you’ve just got to wait for it” (Youth group 4 member)

“If you tell a teacher something, you can’t trust them, you tell a student something, you can’t trust them because it’ll just get spread everywhere, so I feel like if you don’t want people to find out about your sexuality because you’re gonna get bullied about it, then you’ve either got to keep your mouth shut or you’ve gotta deal with the effects of everyone knowing”
(Youth group 1 member)

Not all those who had experienced bullying belonged to an LGBT support group. One young person said they had ‘admitted’ that they thought they might be bisexual on a social networking site, which had then gone “round the whole school” and they were bullied as a result. They commented:

“The worst thing to do is admit it” (Youth group 2 member)

Similarly, other young people said they doubted many people would ‘admit’ to being gay at school because of both pupil and staff reactions.

Not all those experiencing homophobic bullying identified as gay, however. One participant was bullied for having gay parents, for instance, and another was bullied for being perceived to be gay. It was suggested that this was because they did not like football and had a number of female friends which therefore made them “girly” (as a young man), and hence probably gay. Others knew of a pupil in their school who had been (assumed to be) gay but who had subsequently left the school; they remembered that another pupil had refused to sit next to him in the classroom.

School responses to bullying or discrimination

Young people from several different groups suggested that in their school racist bullying was taken more seriously than homophobic bullying; the fact that this comparison was often the one chosen (unprompted) is interesting.

“I want them to crack down on homophobic bullying as much as they do racism” (Youth group 1 member)

For the LGB participants, there - understandably perhaps - tended to be greater disapproval of what they perceived to be the schools’ lack of action:

“People still get away with it in school, it’s a bit disgusting really because the school don’t really do anything about it” (Youth group 1 member)

“Our school never talked about it, they just let the bullying go on... [it’s] very bad” (Youth group 1 member)

“I think [they] respond to it less ‘coz they don’t take it seriously” (Youth group 4 member)

There was some suggestion that schools did not deal with homophobic bullying well or adequately because it was perceived to ‘only’ affect a “minority”, thus showing disregard for those affected. This could influence the pupil’s view of the school more broadly:

"I don't think that I can trust school with any issue AT ALL because I've had problems with being bullied, it's never been resolved" (Youth group 1 member, participant's emphasis)

Some schools were said to treat all bullying in relation to sexuality as 'teasing' which meant they did not need to tackle it. There was also some suggestion that schools dealt with all bullying poorly, however.

"School only really takes action if it's physical bullying, if it's verbal they don't, they can't really do much about it... it just keeps on happening" (Youth group 2 member)

"[Taking the mick] happens quite a lot at our school, it's really bad" (Youth group 2 member)

A small minority of participants thought that in their school someone might be punished for calling someone gay. For most, homophobic language use (whether defined as 'teasing' or bullying) was only tackled within PSHE, if at all. Some felt that homophobic language or bullying should only be discussed if individual incidents were reported, but others felt that it had to be more widely talked about in order to discuss the consequences and also make it easier for people to report.

"Just talk about it, sexuality nowadays is part of everyday life and you shouldn't judge it so if schools actually spoke about it then the kids wouldn't respond how they do now" (Youth group 4 member)

Some participants commented that bullying could become worse if teachers became involved, whilst some participants appeared to accept that it might be too difficult for a school to stop it happening, particularly during break and dinner times, or outside school altogether:

"You always get like people who are mean, teachers can't really do much about it" (Youth group 2 member)

"The most they can do is exclusion, they can't stop it from outside" (Youth group 2 member)

"Anti-bullying never really works" (School 3 group member)

"No-one learns from detention" (School 3 group member)

Some felt that bullying which occurred outside school was even "worse".

One group discussed attitudes towards homosexuality more generally, feeling that gay men were called more derogatory names (such as "batty boy") than women/lesbians, which they thought also influenced what happened in school. This group also felt younger pupils were more likely to demonstrate 'ignorance' about the subject, supporting views above regarding immaturity, and with the implication that it might be harder to come/be out when younger. This may again link to the point raised above about lack of personal knowledge of gay people, and the impact of this - coupled with lack of relevant input in schools - on attitudes towards LGB people. In this group, prejudicial viewpoints were said to be the "same" as sexism or racism, but because they were by definition personal opinions, there was a belief that they would be difficult to change. Nevertheless, some were vocal in their suggestion that schools should still try to tackle homophobia. The age of pupils was again raised here, with a belief that some year groups would "mess about"; they said some teachers also said they could not teach the subject to younger year groups (below Year 9).

Whilst most experiences of bullying among LGB participants related to other pupils, there was also evidence of teachers at a range of different schools in the area also demonstrating discriminatory attitudes towards LGB pupils. Young people recalled teachers saying:

"No wonder you get bullied because you act so gay" (Youth group 4 member)

"If my son or my daughter was ever gay I'd take them into the back of my garden, tie them to the wall and shoot them with a shotgun" (Youth group 4 member)

"I don't want to teach a dyke" (Youth group 4 member)

"God can change you" (Youth group 4 member)

In addition, policies and common practices within school could also be experienced negatively by lesbian and gay pupils. A notable example experienced by a number of young people at different schools in the locality was being instructed to get changed for Physical Education (PE) away from other pupils; this included in toilets and in other rooms located near to the regular changing facilities. Perhaps not surprisingly, this made them feel singled out and excluded, and contributed to some not attending PE and/or school. When one group member had complained about this practice they had been told they were "causing a fuss", whilst another in a different school was told it was for "their own safety". To a certain extent they also believed this:

"At the end of the day it was partly my decision to do it 'coz I was scared of stuff that would get said or done" (Youth group 4 member)

A strong message from this group was that schools should do more to respond to bullying incidents, for instance not leaving offensive graffiti about someone uncleaned in school for over a year:

"I think if a student complains about it they should do something straight away and get it sorted" (Youth group 4 member)

"They just think it's some kind of joke half the time" (Youth group 4 member)

Another illustration used was the water bomb example given above; it was felt this could have been dealt with better as the young person in question was not allowed to leave school to go home and get changed, even though they smelt of urine. For some, they were left feeling that the only way to resolve their issue(s) was to 'take matters into their own hands' and respond with physical violence because they felt bullying 'got worse' if left unchallenged (conversely others elsewhere felt that people had to "ignore it" for it to stop). If pupils did react to bullying in this way they were often then punished or put into isolation for "starting trouble" or "trouble causing". Again, this made them feel that the original bullying was left unaddressed or that their complaints were not believed. One person said that they had been told they were trying to get out of lessons for reporting their bullying and had to argue that they wanted to learn but could not because they kept "getting abused" in lessons. Another teacher had said they were "too busy" to talk to the young person about their bullying (and the acid throwing incident in particular).

Language use

Some discussions focussed on language use that some might define as homophobic, but which often young people did not, and definitely felt that it did not constitute bullying. A clear distinction was made between using the word gay negatively in general, and calling people gay who really were, which was often then defined as bullying. Distinctions were also made as to whether the comments came from friends or people you did not know. There was a broad consensus across a number of the groups that the word 'gay' had "changed meaning"

and “evolved” from meaning ‘happy’ to meaning ‘homosexual’ to meaning ‘stupid’ or “rubbish”, but they did not link the second and third meanings in any way. In other words, calling something ‘gay’ was said to be “slang”, and did not “mean” anything and was not (meant to be) “offensive” to gay people. It was called “a general term”, “really normal” and “a national word” that most young people use:

“I think they’re just trying to have a joke about it but don’t really mean it” (School 2 group member)

Perhaps surprisingly, a number of LGB young people also put forward this viewpoint, though there was clear disagreement about it within this group as others felt that the second and third meanings described above were in parallel and ‘affected people’, making them “more nervous” about coming out, etc. Some also spoke about how the word ‘gay’ being used as an insult made them feel: “[it’s] very annoying”; “I didn’t choose it”.

Elsewhere, other young people appeared to recognise that using the word gay to describe something negatively was “not nice” and could still “hurt” or “upset” gay people or make them feel self-conscious, and therefore should not be used in that way. Interestingly, these suggestions came from a younger year group which is at odds with some of the suggestions elsewhere that younger people are more homophobic:

“I think you can say it as a joke but people might take it as an offense so I don’t think you should say it at all” (School 2 group member)

One (older) participant also said that it was “stupid” to use the word gay to criticise something because that suggested people did not know what gay actually meant.

The complexity of this area was highlighted in one discussion where an argument was made to evidence why using gay was not offensive. They argued that similarly shortened slang words had come into common usage for “Brits”, “Scots” and “Pakis”. This led into a discussion about how “Paki” was not ‘just’ a shortened word but could also be deemed to be offensive and racist, serving to emphasise the importance of interpretation of language use.

Overhearing homophobic comments in school corridors was common for young people, but hearing teachers challenging this was far rarer. Most teachers were not thought to pick up on language use that could be described as homophobic because “teachers want to stay neutral”; some suggested that they do not want to be seen to be ‘defending’ homosexuality, in case challenging homophobia implied that they were gay themselves. Not everyone approved of teachers challenging this language use, however, as they said teachers did not know how the person “meant it”, but others said that it could still cause offense to a gay person walking past, so should be stopped.

Signposting and supporting young people

Clear signposting systems within school to refer pupils to specialist LGBT support were not universal. The minority of young people were aware of Fruitbowl posters at their school, and some had seen these ripped down. There were also Stonewall posters in some school classrooms.

In general, school/teacher confidentiality was not always trusted, which influenced the potential take-up of any support on offer; some young people said they would prefer to access a designated service out of school. Overall, there appeared to be relatively low awareness of services on offer to support young people, both within and without schools.

For those LGB young people attending a specific support service, this was often highly praised, though very few had heard about the service(s) via school. Often they were reported to be the only place that they were able to talk about their identity in safety, and/or feel supported more generally. This was particularly the case where parents were unsupportive or suggested that they were going through “a phase” or “fad”, or were being “greedy” by being bisexual. Many parents did not know their child was accessing this support, especially where parents had threatened to “kick them out” of the family home because of their sexuality.

The role of peer support and socialising that LGBT services could provide was also rated, with members valuing the ability to discuss (or choose not to) their shared experiences in a safe, and importantly confidential, environment which many did not experience outside of the group.

“You’re meeting other young people who like [have] been in the same shoes as you or anything and if you need help you can get it and you can just talk to people and make new friends who are in the same boat as you” (Youth group 4 member)

“It can help in so many ways rather than keeping it in” (Youth group 4 member)

These services therefore fulfilled both a social and supportive purpose. The importance of having an ‘out’ LGB worker who could relate to and ‘understand’ their experiences was also raised as important for some. Overall, there was agreement in this group that youth workers are generally easier to talk to than teachers. Whilst aware that it sounded dramatic, more than one participant talked about being “dead” were it not for the support they had received within the group/from the service:

“This is gonna sound really dramatic but I’d probably be dead if I never came here... because of the amount of bullying that you get and the way that people talk to you, the way that people react, you know you just, you feel like crap, it’s either someone’s gonna end everything for you, or you’re gonna end it for yourself” (Youth group 4 member)

Outside of specialist support, one of the things that group members found hard to deal with (in addition to bullying) was when it was suggested that their sexual identity was a “phase”, that they were “confused”, that they ‘did not know what they wanted’, or that they could “learn to be straight”. They did not feel that these phrases would be used with or about heterosexual young people, and some therefore felt angry that their feelings appeared to not be taken seriously.

A related issue concerned the common practice of LGB pupils being referred to counselling in school which seemed to suggest that they were a ‘problem’, rather than the homophobic bullying they were experiencing:

“I was kind of like, hang on a minute, ‘coz it kind of made me feel like ‘oh is this my fault now, is there something wrong with me?’” (Youth group 4 member)

Some felt that referral to counselling was a way of teachers absolving their responsibility, and some counsellors were reported to be visibly uncomfortable talking about sexuality:

“You’ve referred me to this person because you think she’ll be able to help me but you didn’t bother to check that she was going to be able to help me or not so you’ve wasted my time taking me out of lessons” (Youth group 4 member)

Thinking about the future: improvements and support needs

Young people provided examples of improvements in this area that they thought could be made for the future; for some these were imagined, whilst for others they were based on personal experience. Suggestions for key services to have in place included (named) approachable staff in schools, colleges and youth clubs willing and able to talk comfortably about this subject area and any related bullying on a one-to-one basis; young people's confidence in how much they could trust these staff (and access them confidentially) was said to be crucial, as well as the worker's ability to be non-judgemental, "understanding" and "easy-going". This could be a designated youth counsellor but many also thought it could come from a PSHE teacher, who might be more trusted and/or perceived to be more understanding. Some also suggested that learning mentors could fulfil this role. There were some doubts about certain staff responsible for pastoral care or welfare as it was felt that this did not always remain confidential once shared, as it was often then passed on to other staff members without pupil permission. Similarly, elsewhere there was some reticence to trust school support services that were not always thought to be helpful, and could be intimidating. However, it was often thought that some form of professional service was necessary because it might not be possible to talk to friends or family about this area due to 'embarrassment' or fear of negative responses. Sex in general was not something that most felt they could talk about with their parents, either because it would be awkward, uncomfortable or "weird", or because their parents (particularly step parents) might treat them differently or "judge them" for what they had disclosed. Negative reactions were also feared from teachers, though some felt that teachers could/should refer pupils to specialist support services where available because pupils may not necessarily have the confidence to self-refer.

In principle, many young people thought that schools and youth centres could/should teach about sexual identities from a young age, for example in assemblies, in order to "create proper discussion". Some suggested that teaching about it would create understanding and empathy among pupils and stop them making assumptions about people which would improve other young people's confidence and/or anxiety. These young people thought the biggest problem was lack of understanding, and felt strongly that these lessons should not be optional, and would perhaps be best delivered by external visitors to school. This could also operate as a way of signposting to specialist services. Others were supportive of the idea but less optimistic of the outcome:

"It does make me wonder whether if we talk more about subjects like about homosexuality, homophobia whether that would stop people being so closed-minded or whether it would actually just make it worse" (Youth group 1 member)

Increased visibility was important to most LGB young people:

"People just need a wake-up call, people need to see... Tell me a nursery rhyme that's got gay people in it, tell me a children's storybook that's got gay people in it" (Youth group 4 member)

Many felt that schools should bring positive role models into the curriculum, such as Florence Nightingale, and ensure to cover events related to homosexuality, such as the numbers of LGB people killed within the holocaust. They felt that whilst not doing so was not obvious homophobia, it did show that teachers did not care about or question their own practice in relation to LGB pupils. This meant that a number suggested that teachers and youth counsellors should be trained to be more open minded and use more inclusive language such as 'partner' rather than 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'. Currently, some staff were reported to visibly look shocked or awkward if sexuality was raised with them, so often they quickly changed the subject; sexuality awareness raising training could help to address this.

Broader visibility within school could also include relevant posters, for example advertising local Pride events. There was a suggestion that the context for young people outside school could be improved by more input/visibility about the subject within school, though there were still concerns that formally 'teaching' it could create more bullying and/or that pupils would not take the lesson seriously. For this reason, teacher-led one-to-one support was said to be an alternative form of teacher involvement. Some young people described how invisibility within school made them feel:

"It makes me angry" (Youth group 4 member)

"[It] makes you feel like... should you be ashamed about it?" (Youth group 4 member)

Greater numbers of openly gay teachers would also reportedly help the situation. In one instance, some LGB participants spoke of a teacher known to be out who had subsequently been bullied by pupils, had a nervous breakdown and left. Clearly this had not provided a supportive context for gay pupils (or the staff member) in that school.

5. Findings: Interviews with staff

This chapter is based on data from nine in-depth interviews with staff working with young people, i.e. teachers and youth workers. Headings and sub-headings delineate themes and specific sub-themes. Where appropriate, these follow those also used in the young people's chapters. Illustrative quotes are included throughout.

Whilst not part of the formal data collection (i.e. one-to-one interviews), informal discussions with youth workers prior to carrying out discussion groups with young people suggested that there are a range of views about homosexuality among youth workers who may be working (albeit unwittingly) with young LGB people themselves. These varied from those who explicitly supported an "equality agenda" and who "celebrated diversity" to those who said they were "not bothered" by it. However, there were also strong opinions expressed that same-sex relationships were 'wrong' (with clear disgust visible on their face). One worker made it very clear that they would not want to support young LGB people, but it was not clear whether they would have told them why, or whether the views expressed to the researcher would be more openly shared with young people.

School coverage and teaching about LGBT issues

Inclusion within the formal curriculum

Echoing information from some young people, school staff confirmed that LGBT issues were most likely to be included within PSHE, for instance in the context of identity, family diversity, stress and bullying, equal opportunities, and/or citizenship (rather than SRE which meant pupils could be withdrawn from it). One teacher felt that (sexual) health and SRE should always be inclusive and relevant to all pupils (for example regarding contraception and STI prevention), but made sure not to only link same-sex relationships to HIV/AIDS. This school also made use of other cross-school activities to raise awareness, such as IDAHO, same-sex hand-holding day, the local Gay Icons project, and LGBT history month. Homosexuality was also included in other subjects, including history, Religious Studies (RS), art and PE (via an 'equality board' in the department). Elsewhere, another PSHE teacher ensured that LGBT issues were "embedded" within their PSHE programme of delivery as part of a broader "inclusive" approach. For this member of staff, this included using "neutral" language and having relevant posters on walls within the PSHE department, but also sometimes providing specific information, for example about dental dams for lesbian sexual health. They also tried to relate their teaching to wider social issues, such as homophobic hate crimes.

In some schools, staff 'doubted' that homosexuality was covered within any subjects other than PSHE despite appropriate resources being available within school. Whilst they suggested that it might be harder to integrate within maths, for instance, they thought it should be easier within music, drama, and English. They felt it was important that it should be raised "naturally" rather than being "false". One school had an LGBT history month organising committee that liaised with other members of staff about the curriculum and other cross-school activities, such as a themed form time quiz and a specific debating society session. This was said to be "fairly well received" by colleagues.

"Every year we try to bring another department in" (Teacher 2, School 3)

Schools that were more actively including homosexuality within PSHE differed in how they viewed their contribution. Some said they were proud of their achievements whilst others compared themselves to other schools:

“When you start sort of seeing people at meetings and yes you perhaps realise that you are a bit unusual and when we’ve gone to training and things people have said ‘oh and you should be doing’... yeah we do that so I kind of realise we might be towards the forefront”
(Teacher, School 2)

Others felt they were “average but getting better”. Interestingly, one teacher appeared to show some caution about the subject, despite their support for its inclusion:

“I think for here it has to be slow and steady... I think I’m always careful because I know the Head would expect me to be” (Teacher 2, School 3)

Inclusion of trans issues

Across the board, trans issues were not included within schools to the same degree as LGB, if at all:

“Because there are so few trans students at our age group, we’re still trying to embed L and G to be honest, and maybe stretch to B. The T issues might be a bit too far out for staff and governors to get their heads round at the moment!” (Teacher 1, School 3)

Elsewhere, a teacher similarly commented that gender identity was only a “theoretical issue” as there were no trans pupils at their school so they were not sure what would/should be included.

Only one school included anything about trans issues, but even here the teacher commented that they thought there was still some confusion, and they needed to do more. Another teacher commented that trans issues were not as “easy” to introduce within the curriculum as pupils were more familiar, ‘accepting’ and/or ‘tolerant’ about LGB issues, for example they were more likely to know gay family members. This meant there was far less understanding about trans identities among young people. A number of the school interviewees thought that they could/would benefit from more awareness, training and/or resources about trans issues.

Some youth workers also felt they were less confident/comfortable with trans issues, and did not want to offend because they recognised they might not know if a young person identified as trans. From their experience, they thought schools were more concerned about practical issues - such as toilets and changing rooms - related to trans identities, rather than any other issues. Another worker commented that gender identity was not raised very often by young people but that they would discuss it if need be, albeit without any specialist training, and generally do the “best I could”.

Impact of broader social views

As with the young people, there were illustrations of how the broader social context influenced the work of professionals in schools and youth work. This could operate positively or negatively. Some staff commented, for example, that there is a “big impact” from increased gay visibility on television; they felt “at least they’re there” even whilst acknowledging that characters were often ‘camp’. Soap story lines were often used within school teaching, but one youth worker had some concerns about this:

“[LGB young people will] say things and I’ll think ‘you’re saying it because you think that’s what gay people should say’, rather than saying what you think or what you believe... you’ve

been 'told' to behave that way [by society]... on telly or in the media we rarely have a 'normal' gay person... the soaps especially" (Youth worker 5)

Other interviewees focused on the importance of positive role models for LGB young people, whilst still recognising that there will always be less positive examples, such as the fashion designer Alexander McQueen who killed himself last year. Staff felt that positive role models could include "openly gay" sixth formers within school willing to talk to pupils about their experiences, famous sports personalities, and youth workers supporting young LGB people who might also be gay themselves. Overall, it was assumed or implied that greater visibility in general, and more positive role models in particular, would lead to greater social 'acceptance' in society.

Use and impact of local support agencies

Some staff had experience of the Side by Side project which they believed to be "received very well" by the pupils and left staff feeling "really, really pleased with those". There was also acknowledgement, however, that the kiss scene - whilst being a way of opening up discussion - could cause issues within schools:

"In the play there's like a little kiss, it's literally like a peck on the lips with these two lads and the school went off... 'we can't have that in the school'" (Youth worker 3)

Most schools who had experienced this service said they would definitely use it again as they could see how "powerful" the workshop was with other young people addressing the pupils' questions and engaging with them which resulted in some homophobic attitudes "turning around". They felt this was due to the involvement of "real people" talking about "real experiences" to their peers. The workshop also explicitly talked about language use and made comparisons with other prejudices, such as racism.

Barriers to delivery for staff

Discussion of what factors acted as barriers to staff work in this area generated a large volume of data. Broadly speaking, these can be divided into two types of barriers: those that could be described as strategic and/or conceptual, and those that can be considered more practical barriers. These will be analysed in turn below.

Not a priority

Echoing recent national research on PSHE generally (Formby and Wolstenholme, forthcoming), participants felt that including LGBT matters in the curriculum was a low priority within most schools. The subject area was viewed as "not highly regarded generally" and some suggested that other staff might have thought that there were "more important things" to cover, such as gangs, or that discussing (homo)sexuality is just a "necessary evil". Without any targets attached to it, LGBT inclusion and awareness-raising was said to be an often neglected aspect of work with young people. One participant explicitly said that was why current policy agendas had to be used - such as bullying and suicide - in order to 'persuade' people to support this area of work. Without this, another interviewee felt that it could be "swept under the carpet".

Some external service deliverers said that it was "extremely difficult" to get in to schools or colleges to promote LGBT awareness because institutions argued that there was not enough room in the curriculum. Another described how schools had said they could not put up a

poster to advertise the LGBT support service for young people because they did not have anywhere to display posters or because it would be torn down. They felt “a little bit angry” because the former reason seemed unbelievable and the latter was reason enough to keep displaying the posters. They also said that they had heard various ‘excuses’ for why they could not go in to visit the school, including it not being ‘the right time’ and that there was not a suitable room for the meeting. This made them feel that the area, and implicitly therefore LGBT pupils, was clearly not a priority in those schools. Even when support is free, it seemed to them that schools will only invest time and support if they deem the issue to be a priority. Another worker also commented that schools will not invest in resources if they do not see the area as a priority.

Sometimes culture and/or religion were seen as important factors that also drove schools’ lack of support for, or prioritisation of, this area, largely because of concerns about parental and/or community complaints. Lack of pupil engagement because of their religion was also raised, however, with one example given of a pupil refusing to watch a DVD which contained same-sex relationships because they said it was “wrong”; where these attitudes are strong and unwavering it may be hard for a teacher to deal with:

“I come to a bit of a brick wall there because I can’t, I don’t know how to, I don’t know where to go with that” (Teacher 2, School 3)

No sex please, we’re British

Staff attitudes and/or discomfort about sex(uality) were thought to be key issues preventing LGBT inclusion in schools and youth work, perhaps related to their own lack of personal experience with gay friends. This could be summed up by the comment from one interviewee: “no sex please, we’re British” (this can also be seen in relation to SRE more widely; Formby, 2011b; Formby et al, 2010; Ofsted, 2007, 2010). Moreover, sex was explicitly related to sexual and gender identity:

“It’s basically sex isn’t it? ...the majority of people think LGBT = sex ...so people naturally tend to shy away from that” (Teacher 1, School 3)

Personal attitudes more specifically about homosexuality were also said to encompass naivety and ignorance, which affected their (lack of) delivery around this area. This was sometimes said to be because of concerns that discussing same-sex relationships could ‘turn’ young people gay, or a belief that if homosexuality is not discussed it will ‘go away’.

“In terms of teachers delivering the gay thing in school I think it’s still [intakes breath] ‘can’t do that, ‘coz we’re encouraging kids to be gay” (Youth worker 5)

It was suggested that discomfort was more marked about gay men than women, with lesbians viewed as “almost a comical thing”. Personal prejudices were said to be big barriers, which resulted in the “diversity” of human relationships not being “celebrated” (or sometimes even acknowledged). Some participants said that some staff ‘did not want to know’ and displayed a “not their job” attitude. Even where staff were broadly supportive of LGBT inclusion they were thought to be hampered by embarrassment, particularly among teachers who may not be used to talking about sexuality:

“There are people here that are not comfortable with the issue and feel very embarrassed about talking about it” (Teacher 2, School 3)

There were also reports of “uptight” youth workers not being willing to discuss these matters, however. One youth worker said they knew another youth worker who will not participate in

training around sexual health or relationships because they think that discussing these issues with young people would be 'promoting' sexual activity. Another reportedly commented negatively on gay adoption ("I don't think it's right because [adopted] kids have to have some sort of normality") within a discussion with young people which she knew to include some identifying as gay (but the other worker did not). This left them "fuming" that those young people had had to hear that from a worker, but felt it was a "grey area" whether workers can say that sort of thing within their job.

Discomfort with sexuality could also reportedly make young people reluctant to talk about this area, with one worker describing younger pupils being "squeamish" about the subject. Another, however, suggested that (good) youth workers give young people 'permission' to talk about sex and sexuality in a way that schools or teachers might not.

One final point raised in relation to staff attitudes was the influence of Section 28 and whether this still influenced beliefs today. Some workers feared that other staff did not know it was no longer on the statute books, whilst others felt that there was widespread ignorance about Section 28 (particularly among younger staff) which meant it did not affect things today. There was more agreement, however, that historically it had been used as a "convenient shield for people to hide behind".

Fear as a barrier

Another key factor identified in preventing work in this area was *fear*, which was distinguished from more general attitudes discussed above. This included 'generalised fear' about sex(uality) and specific fears about parental complaints. One worker felt that "misleading" media coverage about PSHE and/or SRE was a "big part of the issue" concerning (lack of) parental support. Another aspect was seen to be staff anxiety about 'getting it wrong' or not being able to deal with pupils' personal disclosures. Fears could operate at an institutional and/or at an individual level, and were sometimes frustrating to workers keen to be inclusive or supportive to LGBT young people:

"I think it's the stigma, the stigma of it all and people are really concerned that they will upset mums and parents... No matter how great a teacher you are and whether or not you got a first or whatever I think it still is that fear of saying the wrong thing" (Youth worker 2)

"I think people are scared of parents' responses, I think people are scared of faith responses... and perhaps negative media attention... [but] schools are really, really well-placed to tackle all kinds of difficult issues... education is here to change people, to open their eyes to what's out there in the world, to make their world bigger" (Teacher, School 1)

"There was one comp and I went along and [they] said 'we need to be careful who we say you are 'coz the Head will kill me'... that was a non-faith school... [but] you've asked me to come support a young person whose dad beats him 'coz he's gay'" (Youth worker 5)

It was interesting to note that those schools including LGBT matters within the curriculum had almost entirely never received any parental complaints.

Stigma by association

Related to the fear issue above, another factor raised can be summarised as concerns about 'stigma by association' which could limit staff engagement with LGBT inclusion in the curriculum or more general youth work practice. Some participants felt that other staff explicitly worried about personal questions about their own sexuality if they discussed the

matter with young people. In these circumstances, inclusive delivery was not thought to be 'worth the risk' of being assumed to be, or labelled as, gay - or potentially even a paedophile - within school. Even challenging homophobic language, therefore, could be problematic if staff fear 'suspicion' or "malicious allegations" being made about themselves. Whilst for some staff this avoidance or 'quick denial' was unnecessary, for others it also linked to the difficulty some teachers have in coming out at school.

Funding

Short-term funding was also raised as a potential barrier to effective service delivery. This applied to youth work in both the voluntary and statutory sector. It could, for example, prevent long-term service planning/development, and could affect how well-known the service was, and therefore levels of service take-up among potential service users. Services suddenly closing was also said to be unhelpful for the young people that were being supported. One interviewee described "trends" in funding streams that meant LGBT work could sometimes be prioritised, and at other times not. This way of targeting particular groups, which could result in 'competing' diversity strands, was said to be perpetuated by a 'tick box' or 'tokenistic' approach to youth work. Funding limitations could also restrict access to appropriate training, discussed further below.

Skills gaps, staff confidence, and use of resources

Staff being willing, but not having the right skills, knowledge or confidence was another area of concern which prohibited some becoming involved in LGBT work:

"Some people don't know what to say and how to do this" (Teacher, School 1)

This also included a lack of awareness of appropriate resources and materials to assist with delivery, and was particularly pronounced among teachers that did not specialise in PSHE and/or SRE. Some teachers were said to be lacking in 'innovation' to not see the potential for LGBT inclusion in subjects other than PSHE and SRE. Youth workers were also said to sometimes be unaware of appropriate services that they could signpost LGBT young people to, if needed, and at times were known to give out misleading information. One example concerned young lesbians being refused access to condoms because of a belief that they 'do not need them':

"Why can't a lesbian have condoms, if she uses sex toys, she's going to need them! People just think lesbians don't have sex!" (Youth worker 5)

Without access to appropriate training, staff were said to be at risk of operating within a "heterosexual model" which could stem right back to Victorian attitudes about sex. Another said that teachers cannot be getting the right information or training if they are (still) saying it is a "phase" to LGBT young people. Staff members' lack of awareness and/or use of Stonewall resources was surprising to some staff, whilst others thought that there was "no way" they could get those resources into some of the schools or community settings where they worked; they felt that "sadly" that was a long way off. Most of the participants had not heard of and/or used other available 'hooks' for LGBT inclusion, such as IDAHO or the Sheffield-based Gay Icons project. Sometimes there was a perceived balance to judge in not using "too many" LGBT resources so as not to "alienate" some staff.

Lack of confidence was an issue that many participants were aware of, even if they did not feel it themselves.

“The teacher does the condom stuff and that’s fine but the gay stuff they have to get somebody in, and it’s like ‘no you don’t, you can do it yourself’... but it’s having the confidence to do it” (Youth worker 5)

For some, comfort and confidence was said to come with experience, whilst others thought training could help:

“Why are [teachers] so scared? ...As a worker really I think and I believe that it needs to be within PSHE within schools but it also needs, teachers need to be taught this on their teacher training... However little it is it needs to be put in there” (Youth worker 2)

Equally, though, they were sceptical about access to training always being a genuine issue, and felt this was often used as an ‘excuse’:

“[Even if training was available] unfortunately I think there’d be a hell of a lot of schools who would be ‘well we can’t fit it in, it doesn’t slip into our curriculum, it’s not what we’re about, we don’t have them in our school, it’s not an issue in our school’” (Youth worker 2)

Lack of access to training because of funding shortages or practical restrictions on part time youth workers’ time were identified as ‘genuine’ issues, though. Lack of awareness of staff views on equality in general was a concern for one worker who said it was not raised sufficiently in staff selection processes so there was no way of knowing the impact of their personal views on their practice.

Knowledge of trans-specific resources seemed to be particularly lacking among most interviewees. Whilst some participants suggested that there should be more (free) resources available, others felt that resources were not always the simple solution they could be seen to be. Adequate confidence and knowledge to backup the use of resources and be able to challenge young people was identified as an issue by some:

“For someone to think that they can pull something off a shelf and then deliver something to young people without actually having challenged their own attitudes and values and looking at what damage they could and couldn’t do depending on how they approach this... [it’s] too dangerous” (Youth worker 4)

“I don’t think that, you know, you can just hand a school a pack and expect that the staff will be able to pick that up” (Youth worker 3)

Another related issue was where schools or other organisations blocked access to certain websites supporting work in this area (such as Schools Out and THT) with important implications for pupils and staff trying to access information or support:

“What does that say?” (Teacher, School 1)

One interviewee commented that “putting a video on” can be worse than nothing if teachers are not skilled or confident in the area. Another participant also felt that resources could sometimes ‘pigeon hole’ youth work into boxes and therefore restrict flexible delivery. Whilst the potential limitations were acknowledged by some, there was still a feeling that they could be used as a good “starting point”. Resources provided by the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health (CHIV) were particularly noted as helpful.

Facilitative support and resources for staff

Factors identified which could facilitate LGBT inclusion also included those that could be described as strategic and/or conceptual, and those that can be considered more practical in nature; some of these are the direct reversal of barriers highlighted above.

Management support and other supportive infrastructures

Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and/or line manager understanding and support was often highlighted as one of the most important factors in facilitating LGBT support and inclusion. This included explicit LGBT inclusion within school equality statements and visible support for LGBT equality by school leadership (in one school this included SLT representatives wearing Stonewall t-shirts to work during LGBT history month). Senior management support was felt to have to be genuine and not just “lip service” which would be “pointless”. Governor support was also viewed as important. A “whole-school ethos” was felt to be more effective than lone PSHE input which could be perceived as a “personal crusade”.

“I think it’s a top-down and a bottom-up approach all at the same time” (Teacher, School 1)

Knowing they had the backing of their line manager often made staff feel “lucky” (a word used by more than one interviewee) and gave them the confidence to raise LGBT issues within their work. In addition, PSHE leads often felt a specialist department was more successful in this than form tutor delivered PSHE would be. Sitting within a clear school-wide equal opportunities policy was identified as important in more than one school, for instance in minimising the potential for parental complaints.

“It needed to be done, just as all issues of equality and fairness... we’re hopefully making a really big push next year on inclusion and equality for everybody” (Teacher 2, School 3)

Collegial support was another significant factor, again linked to a whole-school approach and/or shared responsibility (for instance in LGBT steering committees) rather than one individual’s “cause”. Whilst a small organising group was said to be more manageable, SLT support was still seen to be “vital”, even if they were not personally active. One participant praised the “big steps” they felt their school has taken in developing the curriculum, because of the support/leadership provided by a “very active” LGBT steering group. Formal ‘levers’ such as the Sheffield LGBT Charter were also mentioned as supportive:

“It’s helped us as well because it keeps us able to go to senior team and say this is what we’re working for now, this is what we’re doing now... it keeps it in people’s heads, what we’re aiming for” (Teacher 1, School 3)

A supportive context could also include an environment where some pupils were able/willing to be out, though arguably a circular relationship may be at play here, at least in part, with some schools generating a climate where pupils feel able to come out and that in turn increasing staff confidence to continue the work they do. Positive role models and peer support more broadly were also highlighted, for example in formal or informal professional networks (locally or nationally) where experiences and good practice could be shared and discussed between different organisations or staff members.

LGBT champion

Whilst acknowledging the importance of management and other supportive infrastructures above, some participants also clearly felt that one particular individual ‘champion’ was the

“driver” or “big force” pushing change internally, and it was often their particular dedication or passion for the subject that galvanised developments. This was clearly the opposite of those staff feeling inhibited by ‘stigma by association’. Sometimes it was personal experience and empathy that drove them, sometimes it was broader personal values, and sometimes it was described as willingness to “work hard” at it:

“Difference and diversity are good” (Teacher, School 1)

“I believe in it... it’s not easy but we have to keep banging that drum and keep that flag flying... that sounds really corny but it’s true” (Youth worker 5)

Sometimes it could be as practical as being willing to deliver informal in-house training to other staff. Perhaps in modesty or lack of awareness, however, most (though not all) of these staff were quick to say that they felt the service/delivery would continue without them. Others were not sure, though, and one suggested that schools in particular needed a champion because there are always “so many other things” that could take precedence. Formalising this role can also be helpful, therefore.

Confidence, external visitors and supportive resources

In the reversal of funding issues outlined above, longevity of a support service was said to enhance its reputation and facilitate signposting and awareness among other local professionals. Sometimes it was specialist external agencies that gave staff the confidence to include LGBT issues within the curriculum, for example one teacher described how they “snapped up” the opportunity of Side by Side delivery which “really did make it better”. Getting external speakers or visitors in to school could also reportedly help pupils to recognise the issues, and could therefore be more “powerful”, particularly if the person also “happens to be gay” and thus also able to challenge some stereotypes from the young people.

“The more people we have from outside I think helping support staff is perhaps our best way forward” (Teacher 2, School 3)

Physical resources were also named as a facilitator, for example the ability to use Stonewall posters to heighten LGB visibility within school, or more general anti-bullying resources. Several participants praised the Stonewall ‘Fit’ DVD, with one saying it had probably been the “best thing” they had used. Good quality resources were said to “enhance” teaching; without appropriate resources some felt they might not be as effective at engaging young people’s interest. They were said to need to be up-to-date and relevant to young people.

As raised above, access to training was deemed to be important, and where staff were able to access such support this was seen to improve their performance. CHIV courses and support were often named as beneficial.

Discrimination, bullying and language use

Understandings and impact of bullying or discrimination

Staff had various opinions about the severity of homophobic bullying in their experience of working with young people. For some, bullying was defined by the ‘intent’, as opposed to the use of potentially homophobic language more generally. Another felt that cyber-bullying in this area was also very important.

“You’re always gonna get gay people obviously and it’s supposed to get better, it’s supposed to have got better, [but] just ‘coz the law says it gets better doesn’t mean it does” (Youth worker 5)

Staff working directly with LGB young people were often able to explain the impact that they felt bullying had on those young people experiencing it:

“The impact being gay and being out and being bullied has on young people’s mental health is colossal... The amount of mental health issues in that group that we know about is immense, the ones we don’t know about makes me shudder” (Youth worker 5)

Sometimes, they also felt that this impact was not fully appreciated or understood by other professionals working with the same groups of young people:

“If we [in schools] don’t challenge it we are letting people teach others to be homophobic and we are teaching young people to be homophobic if it’s not challenged... I get kids who self-harm, who have eating disorders, who run away from home because it’s not challenged... some other professionals don’t see it being a massive deal” (Youth worker 5)

“[Workers] not realising for these kids [that] life’s shit, not for all of them, for most of them, life’s a bastard [at the minute]” (Youth worker 5)

Responding to bullying or discrimination

The majority of staff suggested that homophobic bullying was not always dealt with well, though three schools had ensured that formal policy processes included homophobic bullying. This meant that in those schools homophobic bullying should be dealt with via ‘sanctions’, as with any other form of bullying. The development of the LGBT Charter in Sheffield was said to be an “important piece of work” to signal the significance of the subject, though it was too early to assess the impact this might have on schools.

Some youth workers also felt that homophobic bullying should be addressed within mainstream youth work. Workers operating within LGBT-specific provision said that they often tried to encourage young people to report incidents that occur within school; sometimes they get permission to contact the school on the young person’s behalf to request that a homophobic incident be recorded (even when this might involve a staff member). Not all young people were willing to report their experiences, however:

“It makes me sad that young people don’t feel they can report it but I also think that if they are getting it every day at school they just want a quiet life, they just want to come here, somewhere they can just sit and just be safe... and just be themselves and I don’t think they get that at school or college” (Youth worker 5)

Language use

Linked to bullying issues discussed above, homophobic language use was an issue that schools often found more difficult to address. Just one school explicitly said they had a “zero tolerance” policy on homophobic language use which meant that they “hardly ever hear the word gay” now (though it was not possible to evidence this assertion within this research). Elsewhere, PSHE teachers tried to deal with the issue but often felt that they were in the minority within school, if not the only member of staff to do so. They addressed the issue by trying to explain that it could be “offensive”, “damaging”, etc. One member of staff had explicitly raised it with the leadership team, and thought that a formal policy and some all-

staff training might be necessary. They accepted that for staff it was probably “easier not to” challenge it with pupils, but they also described having to raise it among (younger) staff themselves who were apparently not aware of the problematic nature of some of their language use. Generally, there appeared to be a sense that stopping personalised (homophobic) abuse was the first priority, followed by the use of the word gay negatively more generally; both were thought to be very prevalent issues.

Many of the staff felt that a school-wide policy position should support this area to highlight the issue:

[Pupils say] ‘you can’t get done for saying that’, well actually you should! ...If it’s stupid, say it’s stupid, if it’s crap, say it’s crap [not gay]!’ (Youth worker 3)

“I think for us it is the isolation that people feel when people make comments like that that makes them feel bullied and it is a constant problem that yes they do use the word gay as a putdown” (Teacher 2, School 3)

The Side by Side workshops were thought to be useful for highlighting language use (among both staff and pupils); it appeared that many were not aware of issues prior to these discussions. This was felt to be very different to general awareness about racist language use. Youth workers were often willing to support schools in raising these issues within the curriculum, sometimes suggesting that homophobic language should be challenged, even if this only ‘hid’ the underlying problem:

“If it [homophobia] is not challenged it’s going to be left to grow, so it’s only going to stop or decline if people do something about it [but] if they’re not saying it but still believing it that’s better than them saying it... in terms of my job supporting LGB young people, if they’re not getting grief they’re quite happy... so if somebody who’s at school with them is not saying it then that makes that young person who I work with quite good” (Youth worker 5)

Not everyone agreed with a zero tolerance stance on homophobic language, however. For one participant, homophobic language use was thought to be a “natural part of young men’s growing up”. This did not mean that they supported it, but did mean they wished to address it differently. They felt that young people have a right to their opinions but that these need to be discussed and “gently challenged” rather than entirely quashed or silenced which will not, in the long-run, challenge their potentially homophobic beliefs. They suggested that the aim should not be to “chastise” young people, but “to take them on a journey” and “intervene appropriately” (and without judgement) which may well be a more long-term process. For them, language can be used as a vehicle for discussion, not just - as they called it - a “vehicle of oppression”. They suggested that this was the problem with using (individualised) bullying as a lever to challenge homophobia, as it encourages people to just say ‘stop it’ or ‘do not do it’ instead of having broader discussions with young people. The worker noted that these broader discussions could be challenging personally for workers as their sexuality might also be questioned by the young people and they felt strongly that this should not be responded to defensively which could “inadvertently condone” homophobia³.

³ There are parallels here with arguments regarding celebrities denying that they are gay through legal challenges (e.g. Jason Donovan, Robbie Williams), potentially implying that homosexuality is something to be swiftly denied (and compensated for in ‘damages’).

Signposting and supporting young people

Schools

Some school staff said that they were able to signpost to Fruitbowl if LGBT pupils needed support. Other schools had systems in place to support pupils 'in-house' through named LGBT mentors, and elsewhere there were specific examples given of how teachers had supported individual LGB pupils in the past through being "a sympathetic ear". Staff suggested that they did not think all of their colleagues would be confident in supporting LGB young people and would probably prefer to refer on to someone else. Sometimes staff needed reassurance from the PSHE lead that pupils coming out to them was not a 'child protection issue' and that their parents should not be informed. At times, interviewees named staff responsible for supporting pupils in this area but research with pupils in the same school did not find that pupils were aware of this person/role. From a youth worker perspective, it could be positive when a school got in touch to refer a young LGB person; on the other hand, it could signal that the school were 'passing on' responsibility rather than dealing with any issues themselves.

Mainstream youth work

Youth workers had experience of working with LGB young people in both mainstream (locality-based) and LGBT-specific settings. It was suggested that within mainstream settings it could be a "live and really sort of ignored area of work", though a number of youth workers were involved in the delivery of PSHE and/or SRE within schools and tried to include LGBT issues within that. From their experience, most young people are naturally curious and therefore willing and able to talk about the area, even if they are 'opposed' to same-sex relationships, though initial awareness levels were not always high:

"A lot of people were still in the dark ages even though they're [young people]... they're still quite [intakes breath] 'does that really happen?' ...not understanding the word homosexuality ...It's quite interesting that young people are at college and still unaware of these, the terminology that we use" (Youth worker 2)

Coverage within the curriculum might include discussing acceptable and unacceptable words, and statistics on hate crimes and/or bullying. Interestingly, a number of youth workers used their own sexual identity within their delivery and often drew on personal experience to provide anecdotes to accompany discussions. It was suggested that this helped to make their input more "powerful" or "memorable". Linked to the discussion about 'chastising' young people above, sometimes these workers had to ask/tell teachers not to remove pupils for making homophobic remarks in front of them as they felt this "defeated the point" of the session, i.e. to discuss (homo)sexuality with young people they had to hear homophobic comments and did not need 'protecting' from this by the school.

LGBT-specific youth work

LGBT-specific work included designated support groups, and reengagement work with young people refusing or phobic about attending school related to their experiences of homophobia there:

"Part of [their] reason why [they are] school phobic is because [they do not] like what people think about [them]" (Youth worker 5)

This work often involved teaching “coping strategies” and promoting self-worth so that young people do not/will not ‘accept’ homophobia/bullying. It was suggested by more than one participant that in an unsupportive context (at home and/or at school), a designated support service might be the only place in a young person’s life where they can “be themselves”, be out and feel safe.

Generally, the provision of LGBT-specific work was seen to be very important, if not vital, evidenced by some of the feedback workers had received from young people:

“Finally I feel like I belong somewhere” (Youth worker 5)

“I wouldn’t have been OK without your help, I won’t forget it” (Youth worker 5)

The necessity of these services was stressed in relation to young people experiencing homophobia and/or homelessness as a result of adverse parental/family reactions. Even in mainstream youth work settings, supporting LGB young people to feel “acceptance” and “normality” was said to be crucial so that they did not feel they had to hide or apologise for their sexuality. One way of doing this was to support young people to attend Pride events, even where this might have to be kept confidential from their parents. One worker described their disappointment in relation to this one year after a successful trip:

“[I was] somewhat disturbed the next time... it was deemed as not being appropriate to take young people down to gay Pride [yet] I thought that was probably one of the most powerful things I’ve ever managed to do for a group of young people” (Youth worker 4)

The role or importance of an out worker in this field was again raised here, with advantages and disadvantages proposed:

“As myself, I felt I ran [the service] better because I’d been there... you don’t know what it’s truly like until you’ve actually experienced it... you’re constantly outing yourself but if it’s making that young person feel more safe knowing...” (Youth worker 2)

“A lot of it was as well a bit of a support thing, you know seeing somebody like myself... who’s out, you know, and them going ‘ooh I want to be like that’ a little bit” (Youth worker 2)

“In terms of LGB young people part of me thinks yeah they do need somebody who’s out, they do need an out worker because they’re somebody who they can empathise with, somebody they can identify with, a positive role model, but then I also think we can get caught up in this ‘it’s all about me, it’s all about being gay’ and stuff and we need that balance... to sort of say ‘well actually, you know some people are gay, get over it’... how you interpret that ‘some people are gay, get over it’, yeah aimed at the straight people, yeah some people are, tough, but also aimed it at the gay young people, ‘yeah you’re gay, let’s get over it, let’s not keep having a drama, let’s not be stereotypical’... we try to balance that”
(Youth worker 5)

“You are gay yourself, yes, but there’s like, there’s personal/professional boundaries here that are important” (Youth worker 4)

One person suggested that an advantage of being a gay worker was to be able to emphasise that “it gets better” with age. LGBT services also often stressed the importance of the facilitation of peer support:

“We’re trying to get young people to play more of a role in terms of meeting new young people” (Youth worker 5)

At the same time as supporting LGBT-specific services, some workers also emphasised that it should not be assumed that all LGBT young people require support or are “victims” in some way. One participant thought that sometimes teachers reacted with “horror” or “panic” if a pupil came out to them and automatically referred them to a support service when actually the young person said “one-to-one support, no thanks!”. Another interviewee felt that they would not just want “that’s where the gay kids go” services instead of all youth services being inclusive and/or allowing other youth workers to think ‘we do not need to worry about that’.

One final point raised in relation to LGBT-specific work was that at times it can be hard, emotionally, for the worker:

“I get the rough end of the bargain from young people who either can’t cope or young people whose mental health it’s affecting or who run away... I get them when they’re at their most vulnerable... and it’s hard sometimes” (Youth worker 5)

This could also include feeling a weight of responsibility:

“If I ever left I daren’t think about it” (Youth worker 5)

Thinking about the future: improvements and support needs

Thinking about the future and related support needs, staff suggested or wished for a variety of improvements or developments. Some of these related to improved practice among colleagues, for example the use of Stonewall resources to heighten LGB visibility, or the use of neutral language such as ‘partner’. More often, it related to support or materials that were beyond their control. These included:

- a specific LGBT coordinator or advocate within local authorities/councils
- a designated youth worker specialising in LGBT support within each local authority
- the development of a local network for staff to share their experiences and good practice
- a named governor at each school responsible for LGBT inclusion issues
- LGBT or equality representatives on school councils
- more teacher training on the issue
- for sexuality and gender identity matters to be included within youth work training
- inclusion across the formal curriculum (not just in PSHE and/or SRE), for example during LGBT history month
- greater youth work involvement in school delivery about these issues
- more teachers willing to be out at school or act as ‘LGBT advocates’
- LGBT-trained teachers in school able to support pupils on this issue, for instance with specific drop-in times
- LGBT-specific youth work resources
- LGBT-inclusive library books
- a variety of services available for LGBT young people, including support groups and action groups
- for LGBT services to be age-specific, i.e. younger and older young people provided for separately as they are likely to have differing support needs.

Additional comments included:

“[Young people need to be] drip fed that actually it’s OK [to be gay]” (Youth worker 2)

“I think everyone should have one of me” (Youth worker 5)

Some interviewees also discussed how the broader policy context currently, or would in the future, impact upon their ability to deliver LGBT support. Primarily this related to a lack of support or status for PSHE (see also Formby et al, 2011 for a national picture of issues currently affecting PSHE), and a changing youth work environment. The latter was said to be losing the focus on informal education and moving towards being driven by responding to national policy agendas such as teenage pregnancy and/or anti-social behaviour and crime prevention. They argued that responding to “moral panics and media hype and central government agendas” was not helpful, and could break down the trust between young people and the youth service, risking genuine support “falling away” as youth work becomes more about “enforcement”, thereby “legitimising” young people as a “target” rather than recipients of support/provision. Essentially this meant that youth work was becoming tick box or target-orientated rather than needs-orientated, which meant that potentially vulnerable young people - such as LGBT groups - could lose out.

6. Conclusions, discussion and recommendations

Whilst this project was relatively small and cannot claim to have generated wide-scale, universally generalisable results, it does add weight to a growing body of work in this area. Its strength also lies in its focus on barriers and facilitators to delivery, as these issues need to be understood if improvements are to be made.

This concluding chapter outlines key findings from across the three data sources (survey of young people and in-depth methods with both young people and professionals), using the shared headings/themes. It also raises some discussion points and sets out recommendations that arise from the research.

Conclusions

School coverage and teaching about LGBT issues

The survey and in-depth methods with young people suggests that there is currently patchy inclusion of LGBT matters within schooling. Recent national research on PSHE also suggested that approaches to homophobic bullying are rarely embedded within the formal curriculum (Formby et al, 2011). Trans issues, in particular, are least likely to be addressed. Staff and young people noted that LGBT inclusion was more likely to be supported (just) within the PSHE curriculum than in any other subject areas or embedded across the entire curriculum. Generally, use of whole-school approaches and/or specific resources, such as LGBT history month, was low, though sometimes youth workers were involved in specialist awareness-raising delivery. PSHE-based delivery might, for example, include discussion of identity, citizenship or family diversity. Examples that might be called 'good practice' included use of cross-school activities to raise awareness, such as IDAHO, same-sex hand-holding day, the local Gay Icons project, and LGBT history month.

As the majority of young people involved in face-to-face methods had not experienced any LGBT-related teaching, the contrast between this 'taboo' and invisibility within the formal curriculum, and the visibility of homosexuality within informal contexts was stark. This was often related to the prevalence of homophobic language use among young people, but also a 'natural' interest in, or curiosity about, (homo)sexuality. In comparison, some staff implied that LGBT issues were only of interest to LGBT young people, and therefore that the relevance within their practice or organisation was limited. This argument was most often made about trans issues, demonstrating a (mis)understanding that a person identifying as trans would always be visible to staff (and therefore that they 'knew' that they had no trans pupils). Most staff suggested that there was less awareness and familiarity with trans inclusion, and felt that it was not as "easy" as LGB inclusion. It could be argued, however, that equality and diversity issues need to be addressed within schools and youth settings regardless of the pupil make-up, i.e. all young people should be taught about sexism, all young people taught about racism, and all young people taught about LGBT equality.

Regarding SRE specifically, the lack of inclusion of LGB pupils in most schools has implications for their future sexual health (Formby, 2011a), particularly where they are given misinformation. Two schools did explicitly say they included appropriate information for same-sex relationships within their delivery, however, for instance mentioning dental dams in relation to lesbian sexual health.

Both survey and qualitative findings suggest that young people are generally open and willing to learn about LGBT issues, however, also supporting previous research (Formby, 2011a). Some participants explicitly recommended greater visibility and awareness-raising to try and combat homophobia. It was thought that this might have potential gains for LGB

young people wanting to come out and/or report bullying. The implicit subtext here is that familiarity leads to 'acceptance'. This curiosity and relative comfort with the subject area contrasted with some apparent staff uneasiness with the subject (discussed further below).

Barriers to delivery for staff

Both strategic/conceptual and practical barriers to staff delivery in this area were identified. These could be grouped as below:

1. *Not being a priority within the organisation*: this included a feeling that the subject area was "not highly regarded" or that there were "more important things". Schools in particular were said to not invest time or money for training and resources if it was not a priority. For some young people this implied a lack of care for LGBT pupils
2. *No sex please, we're British*: a wide-scale discomfort or embarrassment about sex more generally was explicitly related to ambivalence about LGBT inclusion. This was identified among both teachers and youth workers, with some thinking it was a "grey area" how much youth workers' personal views were 'allowed' to affect their practice. Anxieties about 'turning' young people gay by educating them about same-sex relationships were also suggested
3. *Fear as a barrier*: this was often identified as a key issue by both staff and young people, and could include numerous aspects, including fears (often unjustified) about parental complaints, potentially tied to "misleading" media coverage; fears about 'getting it wrong', and fears about objections from religious community leaders (which were said to be hard to tackle)
4. *Stigma by association*: staff fearing questions or "allegations" about their own sexuality because of their involvement in teaching/supporting LGB issues was also identified, linked as well to ongoing staff reluctance to come/be out in professions working with children and young people
5. *Funding*: this could effect the longevity and effectiveness of support available to young people, and potentially related to diversity strands 'competing' for particular funding streams
6. *Skills gaps, staff confidence, and use of resources*: this range of issues included lack of expertise in the area, lack of confidence to approach the subject, and lack of awareness of, or available access to, appropriate resources or training, which could result in misleading information being given to young people.

Facilitative support and resources for staff

Three broad (and interlinked) themes aided LGBT support or inclusion:

1. *Management support and other supportive infrastructures*: the importance of SLT support, together with the embedding of equality policies, was often seen as vital for this area of work. A whole-school approach was also often highlighted. Each of these factors gave staff confidence, in addition to the support that could be provided by a specialist PSHE department, more general collegial support and/or a specific LGBT steering committee. External contact networks were also said to provide positive role models and peer support
2. *LGBT champion*: this could also facilitate the inclusion of this area, with one key person (preferably a formalised role) to drive this agenda forward
3. *Confidence, external visitors and supportive resources*: staff confidence, in part related to access to training and/or the ability to tap into supportive external agencies or resources was also identified as important. Sometimes drawing on the personal experience of gay workers was seen to be more "powerful" in this regard.

Discrimination, bullying and language use

Young people identified the existence of homophobic bullying in relation to young people identifying as (or rumoured to be) gay, those with gay parents, and those that were perceived to be 'different' in some way, thereby marking them out as potentially gay. This included much experience of verbal abuse, though was not restricted to this. To a certain extent, LGB young people appeared to expect, and sometimes even 'accept', the bullying they experienced. The reported impact of this bullying included (sometimes severe) mental health issues, and problems related to school attendance and attainment. These issues were not always thought to be understood by all professionals. The undesirability with which homosexuality often appeared to be viewed was evidenced in some of the language used, for example in relation to 'owning up' or 'admitting' to being gay, and in staff being "careful" about how they approached the subject in school. Reluctance to report homophobic bullying was also common, perhaps not surprising in some contexts where staff were also reported to make homophobic comments to young people, and where school practices (such as not being allowed to change for PE with other pupils) were felt to be isolating to LGB young people. There were also more generalised issues with young people's lack of trust in staff confidentiality concerning this area.

There was agreement among many young people that homophobic bullying was not always dealt with effectively by schools. Many felt it was not taken as seriously as other forms of bullying, such as racist incidents, which made some young people feel that their allegations were not believed or respected. Tackling 'casual' homophobic language use was seen to be even harder, with staff also suggesting this was difficult. There was not always agreement if, or how, these issues should be addressed, partly related to how bullying was defined (see further discussion below). Discussions about language often revolved around the extent to which people saw the (negative) use of the word gay as being linked to sexual identity, and therefore could be deemed to be offensive, or whether they believed the two meanings to be unrelated, and therefore it was not an issue in need of 'tackling'. Use of the word gay in this sense was common among young people (both heterosexual and LGB), and also identified among professionals. Overall, tackling personalised homophobic comments seemed to be prioritised over 'generalised' homophobic comments. A reduction in homophobic language, even if just 'hiding' particular beliefs, was said to be beneficial for LGB young people.

Signposting and supporting young people

Signposting local or national support services for LGBT young people was not universal, yet could be important if mainstream staff (teachers and youth workers) were not necessarily supportive.

Often young people most wanted their identities to be accepted, respected and understood by staff; this meant not assuming homosexuality was 'confusion' or just "a phase". Staff often highlighted the need for specialist support; where this was not in place some young LGBT people resorted to accessing support services available in neighbouring cities or local authorities, so as to benefit from some form of peer support, even where this was not local to them. There were differing opinions about whether workers in these services needed to be gay or not to provide specialist support, though some young people said they would prefer that they were. This dedicated support was also seen to be particularly important where young people were living in unsupportive contexts at home, or experiencing related bullying at school. The safety and validation that these environments provided was often said to be crucial; young people also often reported fearing coming out to parents and/or staff so appreciated specialist support.

However, whilst specialist support provision was often viewed as necessary, some staff expressed caution in case it was assumed that young LGBT people automatically needed support. Similarly, some young people also highlighted how being referred to counselling could feel, in seeming to apportion blame on them, rather than for instance the perpetrators of bullying. Some counsellors were also reported to be as uncomfortable with discussing (homo)sexuality as were some teaching staff.

The implicit assumption is often that there needs to be 'acceptance' and support because homosexuality is not a choice; whilst this may be the case for many, it does neglect acknowledgment that for some (young) people it may be a positive/conscious life choice. In this sense, the argument for inclusion should be more based on an equality and rights agenda than a support needs agenda (which is not to suggest support services should not still be in place).

Thinking about the future: improvements and support needs

This study suggests that whilst there are some strong beliefs in equality for LGBT groups among both young people and staff, there are also still views about the 'unnaturalness' of same-sex relationships and a clear view that they are 'different' and 'unfamiliar' and therefore potentially 'wrong'. Whilst some of these attitudes are directly linked to faith values, it was suggested that others could potentially be challenged by greater familiarity and visibility, both within schools and beyond. Those clearly opposed to LGBT inclusion were in the minority among young people. Some comments also related to broader social values, for example lamenting that portrayal on soaps was still often restricted to stereotypes.

Discussion

Understandings about bullying and how to tackle it

Implicit in much of the above are differing understandings of what constitutes homophobia, bullying, discrimination or prejudice. This was particularly clear in relation to language use and where this could, or could not, be deemed to be homophobic, bullying, or 'teasing'. These understandings also feed into beliefs about how/whether the 'problem' should be tackled. The clearest contrast here was between those that felt a 'zero tolerance' approach should silence/stop inappropriate language, and those that felt homophobia should be allowed to be voiced in order to generate discussion and hopefully, in the long-run, changed attitudes. In other words, are values interpreted as bullying and therefore punished, or are they 'worked with'? This latter approach arguably requires more (complex) input from staff, and would mean giving young people the space and 'permission' to voice potential disapproval of LGBT identities/relationships. Where this 'disapproval' exists, there may be explicit resistance from young people to learn about this area, or have their views 'changed', however.

Resources: Barrier or facilitator?

Evidence suggests that resources are not seen to be a 'quick fix'. Though some participants were keen to improve the availability of (free) appropriate resources, others were also keen to stress that they might "do more harm than good", linking this to (lack of) staff skills and confidence, or reflection on their practice, and their ability to 'work with' young people in ways discussed above. These issues, therefore, may need to be considered in future service planning and development, both in relationship to staff skills, and access to training.

Stigma by association vs. the use of own sexual identity as a worker

As raised above, some staff and young people identified what could be called the potential for 'stigma by association' in the actions of staff and young people distancing themselves from LGB issues. This could include staff avoiding being involved in awareness-raising delivery, and staff not challenging homophobic language use or bullying. For young people, it could also affect (visible) choice of friends, engagement with LGBT-related teaching, distancing from gay parents, take-up of support services, and participation in relevant research.

In contrast to this issue, another question that ran through many discussions was whether/how important the identity of particular workers might be, i.e. the extent to which they 'used' their sexual identity within their job. This is clearly the opposite of those fearful of 'stigma by association'. Whilst some young people were vocal about the importance of out workers, staff themselves were less sure about its necessity, though did recognise that being able to draw on personal experience sometimes could be beneficial, and that they could be held up as potential role models. It was clear in the data that young people were influenced by the numbers of out staff they came into contact with; equally, some staff appeared influenced by the numbers of out young people they knew.

Recommendations

The recommendations set out below directly arise from data gathered within this study. Their aim is to create a supportive environment for both staff and young people, whatever their own sexual or gender identities. Further recommendations and suggestions for good practice can be found in resources elsewhere (see Further information for some of these sources).

1. Schools and youth organisations should attempt to embed senior management support for LGBT awareness and support within their service delivery. Where possible, this should clearly be linked to broader equality policies, and in schools adopted via a whole-school approach (not restricted to PSHE alone).
2. In schools, consider having a named governor responsible for LGBT awareness/support.
3. Where appropriate, attend to requirements in the Equality Act 2010, and use other policy agendas (e.g. the Sheffield LGBT Charter) to strengthen LGBT work.
4. Where possible, identify a strategic LGBT champion within the organisation to drive the agenda forward.
5. Investigate the potential for supplementing an LGBT champion role with a specific LGBT organising committee with clear roles and responsibilities, and lines of communication to cascade information up and down within the organisation.
6. Consider producing staff briefings to cover key points of importance, such as the importance of confidentiality to young people, whether in school or other service provision.
7. Source and facilitate access to staff training for both full time and part time workers. This could include general input on LGBT awareness and equality and diversity, as well as specific guidance on appropriate/neutral language and homophobic and transphobic bullying.

8. Where possible, attempt to work in partnership with other schools and service providers to facilitate peer support and the sharing of good practice examples and other experiences. If formal networks are not in place, informal contacts can be used. This should not be restricted to only PSHE teachers. For organisations in Sheffield there is the new Sex and Relationships forum run by the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health.
9. Investigate the potential for a named LGBT role within schools and organisations; this could be a designated support worker, or someone identified as a coordinator to act as a first point of contact to signpost and/or support young people. The importance of confidentiality should again be stressed here.
10. Make use of appropriate external support agencies where these exist, but ensure this is not perceived as 'passing on' responsibility or duty of care; make sure there are adequate lines of communication in place first.
11. Ensure access to appropriate resources to facilitate effective education and/or service delivery. Potential sources of support include GIRES, IDAHO, LGBT history month, and Stonewall (but there are also many others). Local authorities should consider signing up to the Stonewall Education Champions programme, as Sheffield has done. Schools, and where possible youth organisations, should work towards the goals within Stonewall's guidance, Sheffield's LGBT Charter and/or other local Charters.
12. Heighten LGBT visibility on the premises. This could include relevant inclusive library books and posters advertising relevant local events or projects, as well as appropriate national organisations.
13. Consult, at regular intervals, with all young people about their expressed needs. Within this, make sure that young people are aware of any support services/mechanisms in place within the organisation.
14. Use the above consultation rounds to assess the desire or need for LGBT groups in schools, colleges and youth work settings. Where appropriate, these groups could facilitate networking across towns and cities, for example formalised relationships to Youth Councils or Young Advisors. This might involve named LGBT or equality representatives.
15. Ensure access to specialist support services for LGBT young people; this might involve clear signposting and referral systems, or at times could involve service-level agreements. It also clearly entails the ongoing support and funding for existing services, and might necessitate the establishment of new services in areas where these are not currently in existence. Consideration needs to be given to the age range of services and the facilitation of peer support and peer education.

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Further information

This is not an exhaustive list but is designed to provide some sources of support and guidance, as well as information related to other relevant research findings in the field.

Guidance, materials and resources

Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) See: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk and www.abatoolsforschools.org.uk

Includes information about Anti-Bullying Week

Albert Kennedy Trust (AKT) See: www.akt.org.uk

Supports LGBT 16-25 year olds made homeless or living in a hostile environment

Beatbullying See: www.beatbullying.org

Centre for HIV and Sexual Health (CHIV) See: www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk

Includes information about the Sheffield Sex and Relationships network and a variety of training courses and other resources

Children and Young People's Empowerment Project (CHILYPEP) See: www.chilypep.org.uk

Children and Young People Now (2011) *Bullying youth work resources*. See:

www.cypnow.co.uk/news/1058004/bullying-youth-work-resources

DCSF (2007) *Homophobic bullying*. See: [www.schools-](http://www.schools-out.org.uk/policy/docs/DCSF_Homophobic_Bullying/Summary_Safe_to_Learn.pdf)

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DCSF (2009) *Guidance for schools on preventing and responding to sexist, sexual and*

transphobic bullying. See: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/pdf/SST%20Quick%20Guide.pdf

Department for Education (DfE) See:

www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/bullying/f0076899/preventing-and-tackling-bullying

Includes current government anti-bullying guidance and various electronic links to other organisations

Education for all See: www.stonewall.org.uk/education_for_all

Educational Action Challenging Homophobia (EACH) See: <http://eachaction.org.uk>

Exceeding expectations See: www.exceedingexpectations.org.uk

Fruitbowl See: www.sheffieldfruitbowl.org.uk

Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) See: www.gires.org.uk

Includes guidance on transphobic bullying

Jennett, M. (2004) *Stand up for us: Challenging homophobia in schools*. See:

www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/Stand_up_for_us.pdf

LGBT history month See: <http://lgbthistorymonth.org.uk>

Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF) See: www.lgf.org.uk

Produce *Enough is Enough! Safer Schools Pack*

NASUWT *Prejudice-related bullying*. See:

www.nasuwt.org.uk/InformationandAdvice/Equalities/PrejudiceRelatedBullying/index.htm

Pink and Proud (Rotherham Healthy Schools LGB teaching resource) See:

<https://public.rgfl.org/healthyschools/Resources%20Rotherham/Pink%20and%20Proud.pdf>

Rotherham LGB Youth Group can be found on Facebook

Schools Out See: www.schools-out.org.uk

Sex Education Forum (SEF) See: www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources

Contains a variety of resources, including *Sexual orientation, sexual identities and homophobia in schools* (2005) factsheet

Sheen Amos Youth Trust See: www.sayouthtrust.org.uk

Includes information about the following services/projects: Fruitbowl, Off the Scene, Side by Side, Yambo

Sheffield LGBT Education Champions Charter

For more details contact Sheffield City Council staff Chris Anderson on 0114 250 6730 or Bashir Khan on 0114 250 6886

Stonewall See:

www.stonewall.org.uk/at_school/education_for_all/quick_links/education_resources

Includes a variety of education related resources and relevant research, including the *Stonewall Education Equality Index 2011: Preventing and tackling homophobic bullying in Britain's schools*

Tacade See: www.tacklehomophobia.com

Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) See:

www.tht.org.uk/informationresources/professionals/resources-teachers/content.htm

Includes the *Out in School* resource

Available research and related information

Beadle, P. (2009) Battle to beat the last acceptable prejudice, *The Guardian*. See:

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EHRC See:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/beyond-tolerance-sexual-orientation-project/supplementary-research

Includes large sexual orientation research review from 2008

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www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/RB594

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<http://ywca.coopa.net/downloads/resources/policy/pridenotprej.pdf>