Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Workers
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

A Qualitative Research Study

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The Comparative Organisation and Equality Research Centre

The Comparative Organisation and Equality Research Centre (COERC) is an accredited University research centre, located in the Business School at London Metropolitan University and affiliated to the Working Lives Research Institute. It provides a platform for the conduct, dissemination and debate of interdisciplinary research into employment, work organisation and equality and diversity in comparative and international perspective. Co Directors: Fiona Colgan and Stephen Perkins. For further information see www.workinglives.org.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGINGS

- Coming out at work can enable lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) workers to feel confident at work; have a happier work experience; foster openness and interaction with colleagues and improve productivity.

- Equal opportunities policies; same sex benefits; positive employer and trade union signals; the existence of LGB(T) groups, the presence of LGB colleagues and LGB senior managers can help LGB people come out.

- LGB people may be prevented from coming out by fears about career progression; lack of visible senior LGB staff; temporary employment status; previous negative experiences of discrimination and harassment; desiring privacy; 'macho' or religious attitudes/behaviours of co-workers.

- For LGB workers the extent to which homophobia is accepted or challenged within the workplace is a key indicator of inclusion. Concerns were expressed about the enforcement of policy within organisations. Respondents voiced strong concerns about the way in which organisations relied on LGB people to come forward and 'whistle blow' before tackling problems.

- Discrimination and harassment can play a part in lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' decisions to avoid promotion or stay within certain parts of organisations. Perceptions of a homophobic or unsafe environment; negative experiences and an inability to come out can all result in LGB people leaving organisations.

- Working in a 'gay friendly' environment has a positive impact on the job satisfaction of LGB workers. It can lead to greater happiness, openness; and confidence; improved work productivity and effectiveness; enhanced job enjoyment and a feeling of loyalty and pride in the organisation.

- Working in a negative environment can cause lesbian, gay and bisexual workers to feel stressed; excluded; ostracized and may result in self censorship; problems with concentration and ultimately a desire to leave.

- This study underlines the heterogeneity of LGB workers in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, age, occupation, desire to be out at work etc. Organisations need to develop policies, procedures and structures which recognise this if they wish to be inclusive and representative.

- Over two thirds of LGB respondents in this study indicated they would be more likely to take a grievance if a problem arose on grounds of sexual orientation since the introduction of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations 2003.

1.   Introduction

1.1   In 2003, The Comparative Organisation and Equality Research Centre (COERC) applied for and received funding from the Higher Education European Social Fund (HE ESF) in England for the research programme 'Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers: equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace?' The study commenced in May 2004 and finished in June 2006.

1.2   This report focuses on the experiences of LGB people at work within sixteen 'good practice' employers following the introduction of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003. This qualitative study begins to address the gap in knowledge that exists regarding the experiences of LGB people within UK workplaces.

1.3   The aims of the study were:
- To examine the forms and effects of discrimination, harassment and social exclusion experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual people at work and in seeking work taking account of heterogeneity within the LGB community;
- To explore their strategies for coping with discrimination, harassment and social exclusion;
- To identify what they think the impact of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations 2003 has been on equal opportunities within the workplace;
- To find out what employers and trade unions are doing to tackle equal opportunities and social exclusion following the introduction of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations 2003;
- To identify examples of good practice and contribute to the development of inclusive and productive employment policies and practices.

2.   Research methods

2.1   The research was a qualitative study carried out through a series of 16 organisation case studies supplemented by a series of national key informant interviews. The fieldwork was undertaken by the research team between February 2005 and 2006, a year after the introduction of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.

2.2   The case study research has focused on two geographical areas – London and Yorkshire (Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield). These provide contrasting urban areas with ethnically diverse populations and vocal and visible LGB communities.

2.3   The 16 case study organisations comprised nine public sector organisations (four local authorities, three fire authorities and two schools); two voluntary sector organisations and five private sector companies (one communications, two finance and banking one information technology and one manufacturing).

2.4   Twelve of the sixteen case studies that agreed to participate in the research were members of the Stonewall Diversity Champion's programme and eight were listed within the top 100 employers in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index in 2006.

2.5   The case study research was designed to consider both the organisational 'top down' view of equality policy and practice concerning sexual orientation and the 'bottom up' perception of its importance, implementation and possible areas for improvement by LGB employees working within the organisations. Across the 16 case studies this involved: the analysis of company documentation and reports; interviews with 60 management, trade union and LGBT network group representatives; a short survey and in-depth interviews of 154 LGB employees.

2.6   Within the case study organisations, a range of routes were used to access LGB respondents. These included general publicity to all employees to tell them about the research and invite LGB participation plus targeted invitations via company LGBT, women's, BME, disability and young LGBT groups and their mailing lists; management meetings and team briefings; trade union contacts and email lists: LGBT campaigning groups. Where appropriate this was supplemented by a snowballing approach to ensure an appropriate range of LGB interviewees from each case study.

2.7   Twenty five interviews were undertaken with key informants within UK organisations representing government, employers, employees, and LGB people charged with disseminating advice and promoting good practice following the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations (2003).

2.8   A number of these interviews also sought to address the specific experiences of young LGB people as well as those with disabilities and from BME communities. Where appropriate, focus groups were run with young LGBT and BME people given the under representation of these groups amongst the LGB interviewees accessed via the case studies.

2.9   Of the 154 LGB respondents who participated in the research ninety-five (61.7%) of the respondents were men and fifty-nine (38.3%) were women. Nine individuals self-defined as bisexual (5.8%), two men and seven

women. Ninety-three (60.4%) of the remaining respondents defined themselves as gay and 52 (33.8%) as lesbian.

2.10 Among the respondents, 141 (91.6%) defined themselves as white, 6 (3.9%) as black & minority ethnic (BME) and 7 (4.5%) as mixed-heritage. Seventeen (11.3%) of the respondents said that they had a disability as against 133 (88.7%) who said they did not.

2.11 Nearly half (44.4%) of the LGB respondents were aged between 31-40, a third were aged between 41-50 (31.8%) with 15.9% aged 30 or under and 10% aged 51 plus.

2.12 The majority of LGB respondents defined themselves as being in the manager & senior official (39.0%) or professional (41.6%) occupational groups. The majority of both male and female respondents were drawn from these two groups. Thus despite the multiple- access research strategy there was an under-representation of LGB respondents across other occupational groups.[1]

2.13 Among the respondents, 77 (50%) worked in the public sector, 65 (42.2%) in the private sector and 12 (7.8%) in the voluntary sector. A higher percentage of the female respondents worked in the public and voluntary sectors than was the case with male respondents.

2.14 Thirty eight (24.7%) of the respondents worked in Bradford, Leeds or Sheffield with 115 (75.7%) working in the London area.

3.   Good practice organisations

3.1 An overview of the case study organisations in this study reveals that each has its own specific history regarding the inclusion of sexual orientation within organisational policy and practice.

3.2 Within public and voluntary sector organisations steps to include sexual orientation along side other equality strands has experienced two major drives: first, pressure from LGB campaigning groups and trade unions from the 1980s onwards and second, the influence of legislative and policy developments following the election of a new Labour government in 1997.

3.3 Within private sector organisations, approaches to equality and diversity and the inclusion of sexual orientation had also been

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[1] According to the Labour Force Survey (Winter 2005) the breakdown of all those in employment was as follows: managers & senior officials (15.1%), professionals (12.8%), associate professional & technical (14.4%), admin & secretarial (12.2%), skilled trades (11.1%), services (15.7%), manual occupations (18.7%).

influenced by corporate business objectives, with differences evident between US and European owned organisations.

3.4 A variety of approaches to equality and diversity were evident in the case study organisations including: legal compliance; workforce diversity and inclusion; community diversity; moral and social values and business and market factors. While distinctive in their focus they are not mutually exclusive and there were examples of more than one approach being incorporated into strategy and policy approaches.

3.5 All the case study organisations had taken a number of the steps recommended by the Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme such as producing written policies and establishing LGB groups/networks. Progress varied across sectors in areas such as pension provision, targeted LGBT resources and the monitoring of sexual orientation.

4. **Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Workers: Sexual Identity and Work**

4.1 A range of factors had influenced the work and career choices of LGB respondents including: the transition from school to work; type of work; choice of sector; organisational and workplace culture; geographical location; gender and equality politics and negotiating identity (ies) at work.

4.2 Young focus group respondents (aged 16 – 22) had experienced homophobia and bullying at schools and colleges which had affected their self-image, confidence and studies.

4.3 There was some awareness of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 amongst young focus group respondents but not of Stonewall employment initiatives.

4.4 Young focus group respondents generally felt that they were unable to come out at work and in some cases felt excluded from particular areas of employment, though there was also evidence of a willingness to challenge possible employer prejudice and stereotyping.

4.5 LGB case study respondents (aged under 30) who had come out early in their careers had felt able to do so because of equality initiatives undertaken by the case study employers and cited experience of a 'gay friendly' environment as a key factor in relation to retention and future career expectations.

4.6 There was evidence that some respondents had been drawn to the public sector because of equality policies and employment security.

4.7 Macho cultures within both white collar and blue-collar professions had led to some respondents, particularly gay male respondents moving on from or avoiding particular organisations and workplace environments.

4.8 Geographic location had influenced the career paths of respondents as individuals had   sought a 'work/life' balance by moving to 'gay friendly' cities and work locations where they felt more comfortable both living and working as LGB people.

4.9 For some lesbian respondents a key influence on their career and work choices was the impact of their commitment to, and involvement in, feminist and equality politics.

4.10 BME LGB respondents reported a range of experiences including: juggling multiple identities; seeking work away from family areas and businesses and the importance of racism and homophobia being challenged by both LGB and BME communities. As sexuality was not 'visible' one way of tackling multiple discrimination was to not come out at work.

4.11 Disabled LGB respondents reported experiences of isolation and exclusion from both LGB and disabled communities and of having to make decisions about whether to come out about both sexuality and disability. Some disabled people as with BME respondents found it was easier not to be out at work about their sexual orientation given negativity from colleagues.

5.   Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Workers: Sexual Identity within Organisations

5.1 Within our sample of LGB people working for good practice employers, just over half (57.8%) of the respondents were out to everyone at work. A third (33.8%) were out to some people, while 8.4% said that they were out to very few people or nobody at work. This is a higher percentage than was the case in other surveys.[2]

5.2 LGB respondents who were out at work described a multiplicity of experiences and motivations in relation to the decisions they had taken. Coming out at the start of employment could involve both formal and informal announcements and was typically seen as a way of dealing with things to avoid potential future problems and dilemmas.

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[2] Palmer, A. (1993) *Less Equal than Others: A Survey of Lesbians and Gay Men at* Work, Stonewall, London; Snape et al. (1995) *Discrimination against Lesbians and Gay* Men, SCPR; ID Research (2002) *Employers and Employment Report*, London; Out Now (2006), *Gay At Home But Not At Work*, Survey of Gay Times/Diva Readers, RainbowNetwork.com, 17 January 2006

5.3   The dominant experience of those respondents who were out at work was of coming out gradually over time. This encompassed various experiences and strategies including: coming out to individual colleagues; putting out signals to other LGB colleagues; referring to a same sex partner; making gay references in workplace conversations; displaying pictures for example of partners and trade union involvement.

5.4   Respondents described a range of scenarios in which others had played a part in their coming out at work, both maliciously and non-maliciously. This was usually a benign experience, which was described as inevitable, and there was an acceptance that colleagues would talk to each other. However, less typically it was a painful and uncomfortable experience, which involved both exclusion and harassment.

5.5   Personal circumstances influencing a decision to come out included: beginning a new relationship; ending a relationship; moving in with a partner and having a child. Work related circumstances included: turnover in the workplace; an internal move to a new workplace or role and positive interaction at a work related social situation.

5.6   Motivations for coming out included: the strain of being in the 'closet' over time; not feeling the need to or not wanting to lie and wanting to avoid rumours being spread.

5.7   Respondents commonly reported being selective about whom they came out to. Most typically this involved not coming out to clients, customers or students for a variety of reasons. Gender was also a selection criterion.

5.8   Factors that helped respondents to come out were equal opportunities policies; same sex benefits; positive employer and trade union signals; the existence of organisation and trade LGB(T) groups and networks and the presence of LGB colleagues and LGB senior managers.

5.9   Coming out was described by respondents as being 'liberating'; enabling a happy work experience; fostering openness and interaction and improving teamwork and productivity.

5.10   Factors which prevented people coming out included: fears about career progression; lack of visible senior LGB staff; temporary employment status; previous negative experiences of discrimination and harassment; respecting a partner's wishes; desiring privacy; 'macho' attitudes and behaviours and religious attitudes of co-workers.

5.11   Strategies for hiding sexuality reported by respondents included inventing a partner; filtering information; neutralising the gender of a partner; modifying behaviour and conforming to perceived expectations.

6. **Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual perceptions of organisational and workplace culture**

6.1 A range of factors was perceived by LGB respondents to influence organisational and workplace culture. These included: the sector of the organisation; the national origin of the organisation e.g. British or American; the geographical location of the organisation or workplace within the UK; the presence of role models in senior positions; gender and in particular male attitudes and religious attitudes of colleagues.

6.2 A common view was that regardless of other organisational factors the attitude of individual employees could have a significant impact on workplace cultures.

6.3 There were variations in the extent to which respondents felt comfortable or uncomfortable within organisations and to which they perceived that colleagues were comfortable with references to sexuality. These variations existed both within and between organisations.

6.4 A key issue that arose when respondents were asked about culture and attitudes within organisations was that of the visibility and invisibility of equality and diversity in relation to sexuality.

6.5 The use of discriminatory or aggressive language and the extent to which it was challenged was perceived to be an important indictor of organisational and workplace culture.

6.6 There was extensive evidence of variations in culture within organisations for example across departments and workplaces and amongst different occupational groups.

6.7 Amongst some respondents (particularly in local authorities and schools) there was a perception of a hierarchy of discrimination in which sexuality was de-prioritised relative to other equality strands.

6.8 Across all sectors, respondents perceived that resistance to change played a role in shaping organisational culture. Though cultural changes were acknowledged there was some evidence that heterosexual norms prevailed in both every day workplace interactions and organisational events such as Christmas socials.

6.9 A key indicator in relation to diversity and inclusion for LGB employees was perceived to be the extent to which homophobia was accepted and/or challenged within the workplace.

7.   Discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual workers

7.1   The majority of the respondents within the sample (60.1%) said they had not experienced discrimination at work on grounds of their sexual orientation during the last four years.   However just under one in five (18%) of the respondents said that they had experienced discrimination and just under one in four (22.1%) said they did not know whether they had experienced discrimination. The percentage of respondents who reported discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is lower in this qualitative research study than in other recent quantitative studies.[3]

7.2   The majority of respondents (70.8%) within the sample said that they had not experienced harassment on grounds of sexual orientation during the last four years, 22.7% said they had experienced harassment with 6.5% responding that they did not know whether they had or not. Again the percentage of respondents who reported harassment on grounds of sexual orientation was lower than in other studies.[4]

7.3   Respondents who said they had been subject to discrimination and harassment at work described a variety of experiences ranging from discomfort and signs of embarrassment on the part of managers and colleagues, exclusion by colleagues through to homophobic comments and insults. At its most extreme, harassment had been experienced in the form of bullying and physical intimidation.

7.4   Discrimination and harassment were reported to have played apart in the decisions taken by respondents to leave organisations or to stay within certain parts of organisations. Reasons for leaving organisations included perceptions of a homophobic or unsafe environment; experience of harassment and an inability to come out.

7.5   Respondents described a range of strategies for coping and dealing with discrimination, harassment and discriminatory attitudes. Non- challenging responses included: avoidance; ignoring remarks; using humour; hiding emotion. Alternative challenging strategies included: taking control of situations; seeking to educate people and challenging prejudice head on.

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[3] For example, the TUC survey (2000) *Straight Up! Why the Law Should Protect Lesbian and Gay Workers,* London found that 44% of people surveyed had suffered discriminatory treatment at work, a UNISON survey (2003) of its members reported that over 52% said that they had been discriminated against because of their sexual orientation (*Unpublished Survey of UNISON LGBT Members*). The ID Research survey (2002) identified the workplace as the most common site of discrimination against LGB people and found that 28% of its respondents reported discrimination on grounds of sexuality (*Employers and Employment Report*, London).
[4] For example Palmer's, Stonewall survey (op cit. 1993) found that 48% of respondents considered they had been harassed because of their sexuality.

7.6   The most common source of potential support described by respondents in relation to discrimination and harassment was the line manager where he/she was perceived to be positive to equal opportunities and diversity. Other potential and actual sources of support referred to were: human resources; equalities officers/units; employee counselling services; colleagues; LGB groups and networks; trade unions and friends/partners.

7.7   Trade unions were commonly seen as part of a dual route in combination with line managers or organisation LGB groups.

7.8   Confidentiality and in some cases anonymity were perceived by respondents as necessary when taking up complaints of harassment and discrimination.

7.9   Respondents expressed concern that they risked exposing themselves or generating a backlash when seeking a resolution to discrimination or harassment and that even supportive handling of a complaint would not guarantee a change in individual attitudes within the workplace.

8.   **Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Workers: Perceptions of Organisational Policy and Practice**

8.1   In general the case study employers in this study were seen as 'gay friendly' in policy and practice. However, there was evidence of a perceived implementation gap amongst respondents. Within the sample, a majority (81.1%) strongly agreed/agreed that their employer was gay friendly in policy, and nearly two thirds (62.7%) strongly agreed/agreed that their employer was gay friendly in practice.

8.2   There was some variation by sector. Over three quarters of public sector LGB respondents (77.6%) agreed their employer was 'gay friendly' in terms of its employment policies with 63.1% agreeing that this was the case in practice. Amongst private sector LGB respondents, 83.1% agreed their employer was 'gay friendly' in terms of its employment policies whereas 60% agreed that this was the case in practice. Nearly all of the voluntary sector employees (91.6%) agreed their employer was 'gay friendly' in terms of its employment policies with 75% agreeing that this was the case in practice.

8.3   Perceived barriers to policy implementation related to a range of factors: policy promotion; managerial commitment; cultural conflicts; attitudes to LGB employees; enforcement; resources; the availability of evidence and communication.

8.4   Respondents highlighted a variety of policy initiatives which they believed had made a difference; the appointment of diversity champions; workplace

campaigns highlighting inclusion and safety; sponsorship of external LGB events; the establishment of LGB groups and networks and the integration of equality and diversity into job roles and performance management systems.

8.5   Respondents also identified a range of possible initiatives which they felt would make a difference: anti discrimination training; the promotion of same sex benefits; the use of the intranet to communicate policy and practice; the presence of senior LGB role models; mentoring for LGB employees; better resourcing of LGB groups and networks; marketing to LGB customers and clients and targeted recruitment advertising.

8.6   Respondents offered various perspectives on how they would like to be treated at work: a person centered rather than sexuality centered approach; the avoidance of stereotyping; equal treatment and not being treated differently and an understanding and acknowledgement of diverse sexualities.

8.7   Concerns were expressed about the enforcement of policy within organisations. Respondents voiced strong concerns about the way in which organisations relied on LGB people to come forward and 'whistle blow' and the burden and risk of exposure that this placed on individuals experiencing harassment and discrimination.

8.8   Respondents overwhelmingly (81.6%) believed that working in a 'gay friendly' environment had a positive impact on their job satisfaction. The perceived benefits of working in a positive environment were: greater happiness and openness; the freedom to speak; greater confidence; feeling supported; improved work productivity and effectiveness; enhanced job enjoyment and a feeling of loyalty and pride in the organisation.

8.9   Working in a negative environment was seen to lead to frustration; exclusion; ostracism; self censorship; problems with concentration and ultimately a desire to leave.

9.   **Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' experiences of groups and networks**

9.1   One of the key initiatives cited by LGB respondents as evidence of an organisation beginning to become 'gay friendly' was the establishment of LGBT networks/groups.

9.2   Respondents identified a range of functions served by LGBT groups and networks. These included: the opportunity to socialise with other LGB colleagues; opportunities for networking about a variety of work related

and other issues; the provision of support to LGB employees experiencing discrimination and harassment; influencing and monitoring policy; providing expert advice on practice in relation to sexuality; mentoring and training; campaigning on LGB issues and in the case of trade union LGBT groups negotiating with employers on LGB issues.

9.3 These functions were not seen as mutually exclusive and respondents commonly identified multiple functions and priorities for LGBT groups.

9.4 A common concern amongst respondents was that groups and networks were not sufficiently representative of particular groups of LGB people, particularly BME and disabled LGB people and those in manual occupations. Lesbians also highlighted the problem of groups being dominated by gay men and their concerns.

9.5 There was also a common concern that LGBT groups were not sufficiently accessible to those not out at work, particularly those in manual and frontline occupations.

9.6 Trade union representatives were broadly supportive of employer initiatives to establish LGBT groups and accepted that employer groups and trade union groups could co-exist. However, there was a perception that LGBT groups organised by employers tended to be skewed towards male, professional and managerial workers and they pointed to their shortcomings in relation to campaigning and negotiating.

9.7 Organisational LGBT group members were sometimes members of trade unions and sometimes not. Some among the latter group perceived potential tensions if the overlap became too close and expressed concerns about the possible withdrawal of senior management support.

10. Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' awareness and perceptions of the Sexual Orientation Regulations

10.1 In general LGB respondents (73.2% of the sample) were aware but not necessarily knowledgeable about the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations. However, this was not usually as a result of communication from the employer.

10.2 Internal sources of information about the Regulations cited by respondents that involved the employer were the use of the intranet; training and LGBT groups and networks. Other internal sources of information included trade union groups and publicity and interaction with individual colleagues.

10.3   External sources of information about the Regulations cited by respondents included the media, the gay press, Stonewall, the internet and central government emails/websites.

10.4   However, LGB respondents who said they were aware of the Regulations did not agree that they were particularly knowledgeable about them.

10.5   Overall there was a widespread perception amongst respondents that the Regulations had made little or no impact on organisational policy and practice.This was commonly associated with a perception that organisations were 'ahead of the game' and that policies had been in place prior to the introduction of the Regulations.

10.6   However, a third of respondents (34%) thought that the Regulations had made a positive impact both in terms of creating the impetus for new initiatives and providing a form of 'leverage' for LGBT groups and networks.

10.7   Trade union representatives broadly welcomed the Regulations and discussed the way in which they had assisted them in bargaining for LGB members. However national trade union representatives highlighted the shortcomings of the legislation particularly the religion and belief exemptions.

10.8   However, the perceived impact of the Regulations on respondents as individual employees was more positive. Over two thirds of respondents (64.7%) indicated that they would be more likely to take a grievance if a problem arose since the introduction of the Regulations. A range of reasons were given for this including greater confidence to challenge employers and the existence of a more defined framework in which to pursue a complaint.

10.9   Whilst some respondents were more agnostic, cautious and even sceptical about the benefits of the Regulations, in general they welcomed them because they provided hitherto non-existent legal recognition and parity with other groups.

10.10 Respondents also offered different perspectives about the extent to which the Regulations would bring about a change in attitudes to LGB employees.

11.   Implications for policy and practice

11.1   One of the over-arching themes to emerge from the study is the diversity of experience both within and between organisations. This diversity of experience cuts across sectors and regions. It would therefore not be

appropriate or possible to make detailed recommendations that would be relevant to all organisations. It is important to state however that these were 'good practice' organisations with a history, albeit in some cases recent, of developing policy and practice in this area.

11.2   How organisations develop policy and practice in this area will depend on a range of factors including: the nature of the business; size, geographical spread and location; interface with community, service users and customers; historical approach to equality and diversity and employee consultation and communication mechanisms.

11.3   However, it is possible to draw from the findings of this study, a broad range of policy and practice objectives that are applicable across all organisations. These objectives can underpin the development of inclusion within organisations and the creation of inclusive workplaces and experiences for lesbian, gay and bisexual workers. They are not mutually exclusive but inter-dependent. While they will have resource implications it is important not to prioritise between them but to develop a coherent framework.

11.4   This research suggests that organisations wishing to create an inclusive environment for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees should adopt a range of policy and practice objectives.

- **Acknowledge and validate diverse sexualities** – Research evidence from this study reveals the complexity and range of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' experiences and in relation to sexual identity within the workplace, the wider organisation and the multiplicity of work contexts and experiences which they encounter. It cannot be assumed that all lesbian, gay and bisexual workers want to 'come out' about their sexuality in the same way or to the same extent. However, it is clear that where lesbian, gay and bisexual people are able to make choices that are based on personal preference rather than pressure there are tangible benefits for them and the organisation. The challenge for organisations is therefore to create an organisational culture which enables individual ownership of sexual identity whilst at the same time places the responsibility for acknowledging and validating diverse sexualities on everyone in the workforce.

- **Take a proactive approach to tackling discrimination** – Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers in this study consistently discussed experiences and raised issues which both explicitly and implicitly illustrated the need for a proactive approach to tackling discrimination. Organisations need to develop a culture of enforcement that does not place the onus for recognising and dealing with discrimination and harassment solely on lesbian, gay and bisexual workers themselves. Systems and procedures must combine rigour with flexibility and guarantee confidentiality and anonymity as far as is practical.

- **Create an inclusive managerial culture** – The study demonstrates the need for managers at all levels to take responsibility for creating inclusion for lesbian, gay and bisexual workers. Senior management commitment has a vital role to play and will be enhanced by the presence of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in leadership roles. But on a day-to-day level it is those with line management and supervisory responsibility who need to be given the tools and incentives to develop and maintain inclusion within the workplace.

- **Consult with LGB employees about policy development** – The needs, concerns and priorities of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers vary within organisations. Implementing a robust top down approach needs to be combined with securing feedback and input from the bottom up. Policy development should be rooted in the everyday experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers.

- **Conduct equality audits and reviews** – The research showed that even within 'good practice' organisations, there are extensive and wide ranging barriers to policy implementation and considerable inconsistencies of approach and experience. Evidence from this study suggests that regular and detailed audits and reviews of policy and practice that incorporate the perspectives of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers may provide a way of highlighting such barriers and the possible means of overcoming them.

- **Find new ways of developing LGB groups and networks** – The research demonstrated the value of LGB groups and networks to lesbian, gay and bisexual workers. However it also illustrated that they create different expectations and meet diverse needs and that creating structures which are representative and relevant is a challenge. Organisations and trade unions need to explore the most appropriate way of developing and utilising groups and networks which take account of organisational and workplace context, communication and internet resources and the views and perspectives of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers themselves.

- **Ensure policy is promoted to multiple audiences** – The visibility of policy was key to LGB respondents in this study. It is vital for organisations to promote policy through training, publicity and information. The promotion of policy needs to acknowledge the existence of multiple audiences with different needs and responsibilities. For too long organisations have treated the LGB area as 'sensitive' and thus been silent on equality and diversity initiatives in the area.

- **Recognise the importance of community outreach and customer focus** – The relationship of organisations to lesbian, gay and bisexual people outside the organisation sends a powerful signal to lesbian, gay and bisexual workers within the organisation. Organisations need to take steps

to ensure that they have a coherent internal and external focus and approach to the inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

- **Embed inclusion within policy and performance management** – A central finding of this research is the lack of consistency of policy within organisations and the way in which this is manifest in lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' experiences. Embedding inclusive practice within all policy implementation through equality proofing and performance indicators will expose inconsistencies and gaps in implementation.

- **Address the heterogeneity of the LGB population** – Both the conduct of this study and its findings underline the heterogeneity of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, age, occupation, desire to be out at work etc. Organisations need to develop policies, procedures and structures which recognise this if they wish to be inclusive and representative.

- **Monitor and evaluate policy** - Creating and maintaining a continuous bank of evidence about practice within organisations has a crucial role to play in enhancing the efficacy of policy delivery. Such evidence must include a range of perspectives including those of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers.

Chapter 1:   Introduction

1.1   The Research Programme

In 2003, The Comparative Organisation and Equality Research Centre (COERC) applied for and received funding from the Higher Education European Social Fund (HE ESF) in England for the research programme *Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers: equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace?*

Although it is estimated that six percent of the UK population is lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB),[5] little is known about the experiences of LGB people in the UK workplace. Research has demonstrated that LGB people experience often harrowing levels of discrimination and harassment at work and that fears about the consequences of revealing their sexuality affects both career choices and personal strategies in the workplace. [6] However, over the last decade a range of 'good practice' organisations have recognised that a commitment to diversity includes engaging with the needs of LGB employees, members, service users and customers. [7]

This report focuses on the experiences of LGB people[8] at work within 16 such 'good practice' employers following the introduction of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.[9] The research is important in being able to explore the 'tip of the iceberg' within UK workplaces by talking to LGB employees who have been willing to participate in the research who in turn work for progressive organisations who see the value of a study in this area. As such the research does not pretend to provide a 'window' into the average or typical UK workplace but rather into 16 'good practice' UK workplaces.

This qualitative study does however, begin to address the gap in knowledge that exists regarding the experiences of LGB people within UK workplaces. It does so by considering the 'top level' organisational view of equality policy and practice concerning sexual orientation and the 'bottom up' perception of its impact by LGB

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[5] Department of Trade and Industry (2005) *Final Regulatory Impact Assessment: Civil Partnership*, London

[6] Palmer, A. (1993) *Less Equal than Others: A Survey of Lesbians and Gay Men at* Work, London; ID Research (2002) *Employers and Employment Report*, London; TUC (2000) *Straight Up! Why the Law Should Protect Lesbian and Gay Workers,* London; UNISON (2003) *Unpublished Survey of UNISON LGBT Members*, London.

[7] Stonewall (2005) *Network Groups,* Stonewall Workplace Guides*.*

[8] Our focus was on sexual orientation and not on transgender issues. However, some of the organisations participating in this research had chosen to adopt policies and established groups that are inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. Some of the case study illustrations and respondent quotations therefore refer to such policies and groups.

[9] The Regulations outlawed discrimination in the workplace on grounds of sexual orientation and provided protection against harassment at work for the first time in the UK.

employees working within 16 'good practice' organisations. The study commenced in May 2004 and finished in June 2006.

1.2   Research aims

a) To examine the forms and effects of discrimination, harassment and social exclusion experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual people at work and in seeking work taking account of heterogeneity within the LGB community;
b) To explore their strategies for coping with discrimination, harassment and social exclusion;
c) To identify what they think the impact of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations 2003 has been on equal opportunities within the workplace;
d) To find out what employers and trade unions are doing to tackle equal opportunities and social exclusion following the introduction of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations 2003;
e) To identify examples of good practice and contribute to the development of inclusive and productive employment policies and practices.

1.3   Project Advisory Board

Throughout the project, the research team has worked with a project advisory board of policy makers and practitioners in the fields of employee relations and lesbian, gay and bisexual employment issues (see appendix 1). The board has provided invaluable advice on the planning, design, publicity and dissemination of the research.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The research was a qualitative study carried out through a series of company case studies supplemented by a series of national key informant interviews. The fieldwork was undertaken by the research team (2 men and 2 women) between February 2005 and 2006, a year after the introduction of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.

A concern in developing the research strategy was the need to identify and access an 'appropriately diverse' section of the LGB workforce within the case study organisations.[10] Although the DTI estimates the LGB population at 6% of the population in England and Wales, there is no accurate data on the UK LGB community profile in terms for example of gender, age, ethnicity and occupation.[11] The case study research has focused on two geographical areas – London and Yorkshire (Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield). These provide contrasting urban areas with ethnically diverse populations and vocal and visible LGB communities.

2.1 Case Study Organisations

The 'hidden' nature of the LGB population raised a number of methodological issues in setting up the research. Firstly in deciding which case study organisations to include in the research and how to access them. Research on LGB issues is still a relatively new and 'sensitive' area of research in the UK. In order to overcome difficulties in negotiating research access with organisations, we identified 'good practice employers' with the assistance of employers' organisations, trade unions and LGB groups including Stonewall.

Public, private and voluntary sector organisations were identified across a number of areas, with different track records, cultures and characteristics:

- children's and community services(2)
- communications (1)
- fire service (3)
- finance and banking (2)
- information technology (1)
- local government (4)
- manufacturing (1)
- schools (2)

We approached a range of employers following introductions through the above mentioned contacts so that employers were assured that the research team was

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[10] McManus, S (2003) *Sexual Orientation Research Phase 1: a Review of Methodological Approaches*, Edinburgh: The Scottish Executive
[11] DTI (2005) *Final Regulatory Impact Assessment: Civil Partnership*, London.

competent to do research in the LGB area. A key step in being granted research access was the agreement of the organisation LGB group and trade unions and our reassurances to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. All but two of the case study organisations were unionised (the finance organisation and the IT organisation were not).

Most (12 of the 16) case studies which agreed to participate in the research were members of the Stonewall Diversity Champion's programme and eight were listed within the top 100 employers in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index in 2006.[12] While most of the case studies participating in the project were willing to be identified by name, the others agreed to participate on an anonymous basis.[13]

The case study research was designed to consider both the organisational 'top down' view of equality policy and practice concerning sexual orientation and the 'bottom up' perception of its importance, implementation and possible areas for improvement by LGB employees working within the organisations. Across the 16 case studies this involved:

- The analysis of company documentation and reports
- Interviews with 60 management, trade union and LGBT network group representatives
- A short survey and in-depth interviews of 154 LGB employees

Within the case study organisations, a range of access routes to identify LGB respondents has been used. These have included general publicity to all employees to tell them about the research and invite LGB participation via organisation newsletters, email or intranet sites plus targeted invitations via:

- company LGBT, women's, BME, disability and young LGBT groups and their mailing lists:
- management meetings and team briefings:
- local, regional and national trade union contacts and email lists:
- local and national LGBT campaigning groups.

Where appropriate this has been supplemented by a snowballing approach to ensure an appropriate range of LGB interviewees from each case study, whereby recruited respondents are asked to suggest other people within the organisation who may be eligible to take part.

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[12] Stonewall (2006) *Workplace Equality Index* 2006, London.

[13] The organisations willing to be identified are Barnardo's, BT, Ford of Britain, George Greens School, IBM, Leeds City Council, London Borough of Croydon, London Borough of Lewisham, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, London Fire and Emergency Service, NACRO, Royal Bank of Scotland, South Yorkshire Fire and Emergency Service, West Yorkshire Fire and Emergency Service.

2.2   National Key Informants and Focus Groups

A total of 25 interviews were undertaken with key informants within UK organisations representing government, employers, employees, trade unions and LGB people charged with disseminating advice and promoting good practice following the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations (2003) (see appendix 2).

A number of these interviews also sought to address the specific experiences of young LGB people as well as those with disabilities and from BME communities. Where appropriate, focus groups were run with young LGBT and BME people given the under representation of these groups amongst the LGB interviewees accessed via the case studies.

2.3   LGB Respondents

A total of 154 LGB respondents participated in the case study research.

Despite undertaking the research within 'good practice' organisations with assistance from all stakeholders to encourage a range of LGB respondents to participate in the case study research, the study has experienced the same difficulties as other LGB studies in accessing a diverse LGB population. [14]

A greater proportion of men than women participated in the research and there was an under-representation of BME and young LGB people and an over-representation of managerial and professional respondents compared to the general population.[15] It has been noted that people who participate in self-completion questionnaires and interviews generally do have higher education qualifications. [16] However, it was clear during the study that manual, administrative, service and skilled trades workers as well as BME workers were less likely to be 'out' in the case study organisations and thus much less likely to participate in a research project on LGB issues. This is an interesting finding in itself given the research was taking place within 'good practice' organisations which have been striving to implement equality and diversity policies and practices in order to ensure a 'gay-friendly' workplace. It would seem that sections of the workforce still may not be comfortable to be out at work despite the efforts being made both by employers and trade unions to encourage a 'gay friendly' working environment.

Though this was a qualitative study, all LGB case study respondents were asked to complete a short pre-interview questionnaire. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to provide a consistent profile of key demographic

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[14] McManus, S. (2003) *Sexual Orientation Research Phase 1: a Review of Methodological Approaches*, Edinburgh: The Scottish Executive; Keogh, P. Dodds, C. and Henderson, L. (2004) *Working Class Gay Men*, Sigma Research, London.
[15] Office of National Statistics (2005) and Labour Force Survey Spring (2005) datasets
[16] ID Research (2002) *Demographic Profile*, London.

characteristics across the sample. The questionnaire also included a limited number of questions about respondents' experiences and attitudes, for example whether they had experienced discrimination and harassment and whether they considered their employer to be 'gay friendly'.

Throughout this report we present quantitative data and charts to describe the responses of respondents based on an analysis of the questionnaire results. However, it is important to point out that in doing so we are not suggesting that this quantitative data is statistically representative of the LGB population within the case study organisations or that it is possible to generalise from it in relation to the wider LGB population. A brief profile of the respondents is presented below.

2.3.1 Gender

More of the respondents (95, or 61.7%) were men, compared to 59 (38.3%) women.

2.3.2 Sexual Orientation

Nine individuals self-defined as bisexual (5.8%), two men and seven women. Ninety three (60.4%) of the remaining respondents defined themselves as gay and 52 (33.8%) as lesbian.

2.3.3 Ethnic Group

Among survey respondents, 141 (91.6%) defined themselves as white, 6 (3.9%) as black & minority ethnic (BME) and seven (4.5%) as mixed heritage.

2.3.4 Disability

Seventeen (11.3%) of the respondents said that they had a disability as against 133 (88.7%) who said they did not. Four people declined to answer the question. A higher percentage of women respondents (15.5%) defined themselves as having a disability than male respondents (8.7%).

2.3.5 Age

Nearly half (44.4%) of the LGB respondents were aged between 31-40, a third were aged between 41-50 (31.8%) with 15.9% aged 30 or under and 10% aged 51 plus.

2.3.6 Religion

Fifty seven (39.3%) of the respondents said they were Christian, 76 (52.4%) said they held no religion and 12 (8.3%) indicated they followed other religions (e.g.

Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim). Nine respondents declined to answer the question.

2.3.7 Occupation

The majority of LGB respondents defined themselves as being in the manager & senior official (39.0%) or professional (41.6%) occupational groups. The majority of both male and female respondents were drawn from these two groups.

The remaining respondents defined themselves as follows; associate professional & technical (8.4%), admin/secretarial (5.8%), skilled trades (1.9%), services (1.3%) and manual occupations (1.9%). Despite all of the efforts made within the research programme to reach a diverse sample of LGB respondents, these groups were under-represented in the research findings given their representation in the general population.[17]

2.3.8 Education

Thus it was not surprising to find that the LGB respondents were a very highly educated group. Ninety eight (64.5%) had a degree or above and a further 41 (27%) had studied to 'A' level or higher education below degree level. Ten (6.6%) had GCSE grades A-C or equivalent and 3 (2%) had no qualifications.

2.3.9 Employment Sector

Among our sample, 77 (50%) respondents worked in the public sector, 65 (42.2%) in the private sector and 12 (7.8%) in the voluntary sector. A higher percentage of the female respondents worked in the public and voluntary sectors than was the case with male respondents.

2.3.10 Geographical Region

Thirty eight (24.7%) of the respondents worked in Bradford, Leeds or Sheffield with 115 (75.7%) working in the London area.

It was more difficult to access LGB people in Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield than London. This was true across all employment sectors. The three private sector case study companies and one of the two voluntary sector organisations which had LGBT members and or regional networks in London as well as Nottingham, Manchester and Newcastle and Edinburgh suggested that they had few members joining their networks in the Yorkshire cities and had thus far been unable to set up LGBT networks in the region.

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[17] According to the Labour Force Survey (Winter 2005) the breakdown of all those in employment was as follows: managers & senior officials (15.1%) , professionals (12.8%), associate professional & technical (14.4%), admin & secretarial (12.2%), skilled trades (11.1%), services (15.7%), manual occupations (18.7%).

2.3.11 Out at Work

Eighty nine (57.8%) of the respondents said that they were 'out' to everyone at work, 52 (33.8%) were out to some people with 10 (6.5%) of the respondents out to very few and three (1.9%) saying that they were out to nobody at work. Thus it is important to note that even in the case study 'good practice' employers, nearly half of the LGB respondents who were willing to participate in the research still did not feel able to be out to everyone at work.

A comparison with other quantitative surveys shows that a higher percentage of our respondents were out at work (57.8%) than was the case in the Stonewall survey (32%) and the SCPR survey (36%) completed in the early 1990s. However, our results were similar to more recent surveys such as the ID Research (56%) and Out Now surveys (52%) where just over half of those surveyed did say that they felt able to reveal their sexuality at work by being out to everybody at work.[18]

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[18] Palmer, A. (1993) *Less Equal than Others: A Survey of Lesbians and Gay Men at* Work, London; Snape et al. (1995) *Discrimination against Lesbians and Gay* Men, SCPR; ID Research (2002) *Employers and Employment Report*, London; Out Now (2006), *Gay At Home But Not At Work*, Survey of Gay Times/Diva Readers, RainbowNetwork.com, 17 January 2006

Chapter 3:   'Good Practice' Organisations

This chapter introduces the organisational 'top down' view of equality policy and practice concerning sexual orientation within the 16 case study organisations. Interviews with management, trade union and LGBT network group representatives within each organisation provided an overview of the history of LGB equality and diversity initiatives within organisations and across sectors (Table 3.1). These will be considered briefly before moving on to consider approaches to equality and diversity and the key steps organisations have taken to deliver equality to LGB staff.

Table 3.1: Progress on LGB Issues

- Different organisational histories
- Contrasts public, voluntary and private sectors
- Pressure from LGB staff and/or service users
- Pressure from trade unions
- Changing UK legislative and political context
- Corporate objectives and diversity policy
- Approaches to equal opportunities and diversity
- Organisational good practice

3.1 Progress on LGB Issues

An important factor in understanding the lack of visibility of LGB workers and their issues in UK workplaces was the fairly hostile social and public policy climate which existed in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s. Most of the case study organisations have tried to be progressive within that context. Each organisation has its own specific history regarding the inclusion of sexual orientation within its organisational policy and practice. However it is possible to summarise some of the key factors by sector.

3.1.1 Public and voluntary sectors

Within the public and voluntary sectors, steps to include sexual orientation alongside other equality strands had experienced two major drives.

The first was during the late 1980s following a big push by LGB campaigning groups and employees within local authorities, other public and voluntary sector organisations and within unions. This led to the inclusion of sexual orientation within equal opportunities policies and the work of equality departments as early as the late 1980s. The Conservative government, however, showed little support for these 'gay friendly' developments. Thus interviewees within the local

authority, school, voluntary sector and the fire services case studies talked of the stalling of this early progress. Particularly key was the introduction of Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) which made it illegal for local authorities to 'intentionally promote homosexuality,' and created a difficult political climate for those trying to progress work in the area in local authorities, schools and voluntary sector organisations working with children and young people.

The second political impetus cited for change was the election of a Labour Government in 1997, the establishment of new structures, expansion of the voluntary sector role and the expansion of equality legislation. A range of duties have been placed on the public sector including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) and the raft of legislation which has been introduced to remove discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in a number of areas including the sexual age of consent, fostering and adoption of children. Three important recent measures have included the repeal of the Local Government Act: Section 28 (2003),[19] the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations (2003),[20] and the Civil Partnership Act (2004).[21]

Within the public sector, local authorities, for example, have sought to adopt a comprehensive and systematic approach to dealing with equality issues as outlined in the *Equality Standard for Local Government.*[22] The standard provides a common approach for dealing with equality for race, gender and disability which most progressive local authorities have sought to extend to anti-discrimination policies for age, sexuality, class and religion and belief. This broader equality and diversity focus is now being adopted in the good practice public and voluntary sector organisations assisted by the impetus provided by the introduction of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations and the expansion of anti-discrimination legislation in services and on grounds of age and religious beliefs.

3.1.2 Private Sector

During this period, sections of the private sector have also developed progressive initiatives particularly US organisations operating in Europe which had earlier established sexual diversity policies and procedures. As US

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[19] Section 28 made it illegal for local authorities to 'intentionally promote homosexuality' or the 'acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'

[20] The Regulations outlaw discrimination in the workplace on grounds of sexual orientation and protection against harassment at work is provided for the first time ever.

[21] The CPA (2004) allows same-sex couples to gain formal legal recognition of their relationships if they choose to do so and it is hoped that it will address some of the shortcomings in the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations with respect to pension rights.

[22] www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk

subsidiaries have implemented these in the UK, many UK-based competitors have been keen to follow suit.

The five private companies participating in the research are global companies although the research project focused only on the UK operation as the case study for each company. Thus, although the UK legislative and political changes outlined above have also impacted on the private sector case study organisations, arguably a more substantial force shaping their equality and diversity policies has been corporate business objectives. All five private sector companies would argue that they 'are ahead of the game' when it comes to tackling LGB discrimination and social exclusion and so did not need to 'tweak or change' policies after the introduction of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations. This track record can be illustrated by considering two case study examples below.

One of those in the forefront of LGB equality amongst the US private sector organizations had established as a basic principle since its foundation a policy on 'Respect for the Individual.' Over time this has been modified to incorporate equality and diversity. In 1985, sexual orientation was introduced into its equality and diversity policy. The overall Respect for the Individual policy states that the company is committed to 'creating an inclusive working environment' and 'ensuring that employees feel comfortable, productive and able to reach their full potential.' To this end the organization has introduced and adapted US policies and practices concerning LGBT equality and social inclusion to the UK and Europe. In 1991, informal LGB network groups began at company locations in the US and Canada. By the mid-90s it provided same-sex partner benefits to its US and Canadian employees. In 1996, the company established a series of global task forces around diversity groups and encouraged the registration of employee-created diversity network groups including the LGBT group (LGBT network member, 2005).   An LGBT executive Task Force was set up with a senior sponsoring executive to recommend and advocate policies that ensured that all employees were treated fairly. It ran its first biennial Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference in the US in 2000 (120 participants, 10 from outside the US, including two from the UK) (LGBT network member, 2005). UK LGBT employees had been pushing for same-sex partner benefits since the late-90s and these were introduced in the UK by the company in 2001.

By contrast, one of the European owned organizations embraced a diversity approach in 2000 in part because of its drive to succeed as a 'global business' which 'is trying to be competitive with major US players.' However managers stressed that this came from a more European ethical and equalities standpoint. It held a diversity conference and established a diversity policy, strategy and structures in 2000. Since then the company has identified diversity as one of its ten 'core values'. It has established an LGBT network in the US, the UK and Switzerland. The LGBT network in the UK was established in 2001 with a senior management sponsor, a mailing list and website. Following representations from

its LGBT group in 2001, it reviewed its policies and benefits to ensure that they were not discriminatory. The company has recognised that although the word 'diversity' is now 'embedded' it 'needs to move the agenda forward, get more action, more buy-in…more reality… as opposed to theory.' In 2005, each of the equality networks was allocated a senior management network chair (in addition to the senior management sponsor) plus a task group and required to report back to the company executive on each network group's issues, concerns and propose action plans.

3.3   What approaches do organisations take to equality and diversity?

A variety of approaches to equality and diversity were evident in the case study organisations included in this study. These are summarised in Table 3.2. While distinctive in their focus they are not mutually exclusive and there were examples of more than one approach being incorporated into strategy and policy approaches.

Table 3.2: Organisational approaches to equality and diversity
• Legal compliance approach • Value/Moral based approach • Workforce diversity and inclusion approach • Community diversity approach • Business/Market based approach

3.3.1 Legal Compliance

Managers within the public and voluntary sectors were more likely to mention the importance of the law in assisting and empowering them to make progress in the equalities area, particularly where political opposition or inadequate resources had stopped them from developing LGB initiatives in line with other strands.

I think it's fair to say the authority like the vast majority of other public bodies views its response and investment in equality work based on our statutory responsibilities. **(Senior manager, Public sector)**

We always get frustrated though when we have new legislation that it's only kind of bits of the deal, we would have rather had something that is more integrated with service delivery responsibility…Because you can imagine, we are trying to take forward a holistic equalities agenda, trying to remember which bits are covered by legislation, which bits aren't…There is no logic why certain things have been left out. To be honest what we would prefer is that there is some consistency between the various bits of legislation. So for example, the Race Relations Amendment Act puts a positive duty on us to promote racial

equality. And the Disability Discrimination Act puts a positive duty on us to promote disability equality. It would be great for us to promote equality on all of the groups, e.g. gay and lesbian staff **(Senior manager, Public sector)**

The introduction of the Employment Equality (SO)Regulations, 2003 had assisted organisations to tackle sexual orientation alongside other strands.

And sexual orientation has now become, instead of being a bit of a difficult area for us and a cause of anxiety, I think it's just become a cause of well, that's another part of the diversity agenda. **(Senior manager, Voluntary sector)**

Managers in four of the private sector organisations took the view that the introduction of the Regulations had make little difference as they were 'already ahead of the game.' However, in one private sector organisation, it was admitted that the organisation initially had stuck with compliance on grounds of caution. However, starting in 2005, the organisation had taken a number of steps to progress LGB issues including establishing an LGBT group in response to employee requests.

Our response on most areas of employment legislation has been that, obviously compliance is automatic and we are always looking for areas we can exceed and enhance and build upon that. I'd probably say…this is an area where we have looked for compliance and our policies and frameworks have supported that but I'd have to say we have probably not gone into exceeding in best practice territory as much as is more common for us in relation to other pieces of employment legislation….to be clear, there is a kind of standard process we go through with any piece of employment legislation, we are doing it at the moment for the age discrimination legislation and we are doing it for civil partnerships… we do that gap analysis for all our processes and practices whether it's reward, whether it's pay, even down to like forms, things like that, you know, could they be changed, so we went through that gap analysis on the previous legislation and are doing that for these kind of pieces as well. **(Senior manager, Private sector)**

3.3.2 The moral/values based approach

This approach could be expressed in terms of general moral principles or values specific to the organisation. It was found across, all 3 sectors. For example, a banking organisation's equality and diversity approach was defined in terms of both a broad moral case and a business case. A voluntary organisation locates its approach to welcoming a diverse workforce within its 'basis and values'.

Figure 3.1 Voluntary sector policy

[The organization] is committed to providing equality of opportunity for the children, young people, families and carers with whom we work. We value and respect their diversity….[The organization] welcomes difference in its staff and volunteers. In accordance with its Basis and Values, [we are] working to create equal access to opportunities for paid employment and voluntary involvement while continuing to base selection and promotion solely on ability to meet the requirements of the post. This is irrespective of race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, irrelevant offending background, responsibility for dependents, economic status or political values.

Although equality and diversity might be key to delivering on a range of organizational objectives, for a number of managers there was a commitment that it was the right thing to do.

> Equality means quality because if you've got an organization that's structured in a way that means either in its staffing, in its approach to staffing issues, or in its delivery of service users it's skewed in a way that means some groups in society… are not benefiting as much as others from its services then there is something awry in the whole way it is organized…so it's a good barometer, a litmus paper test to see that the whole way its delivering its services is healthy and properly balanced….But I actually think that the strongest motivator is a gut feeling that this is morally right and I think that's true in the commercial sector. I think when you find a commercial organization that has a very strong and implemented equalities policy, you usually find somebody or a group of people who are very committed to it on a moral basis, they haven't just sat down and calculated it in terms of business. **(Senior Manager, Voluntary Sector)**

3.3.3 The workforce diversity and inclusion approach

Managers across all sectors, recognized the benefits of workforce diversity and creating an inclusive workforce as key to organizational success.

A diverse and inclusive workplace not only encouraged people to feel valued but had clear implications for organisational performance.

> If you are not out, how do you share anything about your personal life… how can we get our lesbian and gay staff to be high performers if they are so unable to actually open up, you know, one key part of what

makes them good performers. So that was a motivator for me. **(Senior manager, Voluntary sector).**

Figure 3.2 Private Sector policy

We aim to create an equal, inclusive environment where current talent is engaged and future talent attracted by:

- Engaging people whatever their background and progressing them on merit.
- Ensuring that our behaviour does not discriminate or disadvantage that talent.
- Seeking out and removing barriers to achievement.

Certainly diversity has increased enormously in the course of the last few years. It's always been a strategic priority… but I would say that we really started to accelerate our progress on it probably in 1997, '98. …we started to recognise that actually this was a pretty critical area of our business and we, the company, needed to do more to improve fundamentally the diversity of our organization... Now we focus on a number of areas within diversity. We focus on respect and inclusion within the workforce. We focus on trying to ensure that we have organisational diversity. We try and ensure that our senior managers role model and lead diversity across the organisation. And we equally try and ensure that we partner with external organisations to ensure that we can share best practice, participate and learn from those organisations to ensure that we have a modern portfolio of programmes that reflect sort of society's trends and the needs of people coming to work in the company. **(Senior manager, Private sector)**

3.3.4 The community diversity approach

The community based approach was more typically associated with local authorities, schools and the fire service.

Figure 3.2 Local authority policy

Improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in (the borough) and to engage with all our communities to celebrate their rich diversity and also to work through the tension that this diversity can sometimes bring.

Equal opportunities and diversity were considered key to delivering quality services and meeting the needs of the community.

> But you know, equal opportunities are really an important issue to me, you know, that's what drives me really…. we worked towards equal opportunities and…anti-bullying because I knew with this sort of population you had to do it so we got everybody involved and created those two policies and developing those two policies …it's about the whole school culture. It's, to me inclusion is about bringing policy into practice... I always start with the practice and the way that I behave…I mean to me it's about including staff first of all and making sure that every member of staff is able to recognise and to challenge inappropriate comments…not to ignore it. And that's the biggest thing. And the way that I've worked on that is always by including my staff so you know, it's not just about teachers here, I've got more support staff here than I have teachers and they come from a very different background. And one of the key things, I think, when looking at that for me has been that we have included that staff, we've let them into the secret, we've taken them on board in terms of what the vision of the school is, what are our aims. So they will tell you what inclusion is about. Maybe in different words, but they will carry that message to parents. **(Senior manager, Public sector)**

However, the changing nature of the community was acknowledged in the approaches of other organisations. For example, a banking organisation recognised that its strategy needed to respond to 'changing demographics, social values and attitudes that impact on business.'

3.3.5 The business case/market based approach

The business case was most clearly articulated by private sector companies although public sector and voluntary organisations talked about the importance of a diverse workforce in developing and providing appropriate services for the community .

For example a respondent from one company located both its broad approach to equality and diversity and its approach to the LGBT community in particular as being important to the business and selling products:

> In terms of the way that (the company) sees diversity it's, I think diversity is crucial to the business. We see it as if we can employ people from a wide range of backgrounds…that will help us engage with our customers and understand the solutions and the way that they need to interact so we then develop the inclusive solutions that work for everybody. So if we can develop technology that works for disability, for people with disabilities that's actually inclusive and then

is a great product that everybody wants, then fantastic…. And around the whole LGBT area in particular, it's quite an important market for us because LGBT people tend to have high disposable income and tend to be early adapters of technology and there's lots of research being done around that. So actually it's quite a key market for us to have LGBT people engaged in our products so that we can use them as ambassadors for how it can work. **(Senior manager, Private sector))**

Figure 3.4 Private sector policy

Promoting the empowerment of gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people in the workplace has been a key initiative within the company for many years. Our efforts to be completely inclusive have not only helped create a dynamic workforce but also opened up new markets to us. We have created a more open and hospitable environment to accommodate all sexual orientations, gender identity or expression.

3.4   Organisational good practice

All of the organisations participating in the research are committed to equality and diversity. Twelve of the case organisations are members of the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme. Of the remaining four organisations, two organisations are schools located within local authorities which are signed up to the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme, the third is a local authority and the fourth is a fire service with a good track-record in LGB and equality work.

The Diversity Champions programme was established in 2001 to bring together organisations that wanted to tackle sexual orientation discrimination, and also wanted to share good practice, benchmark and develop ideas and promote diversity in the workplace. One of its key messages has been that 'people perform better when they can be themselves'.[23]

Among our case study companies, all had taken a number of the steps outlined in the Stonewall Diversity Champion's programme: [24]

- Developed and promoted a written equality/diversity policy barring discrimination and specifically stating 'sexual orientation'
- Developed a working group/diversity team that includes LGB issues

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[23] Stonewall (2005) *Diversity Champions Information Leaflet*, Stonewall, London.
[24] Stonewall (2006) *Workplace Equality Index*, Stonewall, London.

- Established a lead person for LGB issues at Board/Chief executive level
- Established an LGBT network group for support, consultation and to inform policy at work (except for the 2 schools)
- Audited policies and procedures for employees in line with Employment (SO) Regulations 2003 & Civil Partnership Act.
- Ran diversity awareness training that referred to 'sexual orientation' and drew on concrete examples
- Sponsored or supported an LGB organisation or event (although neither school had done so nor had they participated in LGBT history month yet)
- Recruited staff or advertised products or services in UK LGB media (except for the two schools)

Areas where our research revealed that policy and practice development varied were as follows:

- The public sector organisations fell behind the private and voluntary sector when it came to pensions entitlement to same-sex partners in the UK.[25]
- Public and voluntary sector organizations had moved further on sexual orientation monitoring at all stages and grades although most of the case study organizations had either introduced a sexual orientation question in their staff attitude survey or intended to do so.
- Private sector organizations offered specific support to LGB staff via targeted mentoring, LGB leadership training and resources
- Openly LGB members were evident at senior levels of the organisation via councillors in the local authority context and senior staff in the schools but the lack of senior out LGB representatives was identified as a problem by senior managers and LGB staff alike across all 3 sectors.
- Although trade unions were identified as supportive of many of the equality and diversity initiatives, including the more recent establishment of LGBT, groups their consultation and involvement by organizations could be variable.

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[25] This is because they are statutory schemes that can only be changed by parliament not the employers alone.

Key points

- An overview of the case study organisations in this study reveals that each has its own specific history regarding the inclusion of sexual orientation within organisational policy and practice.

- Within public and voluntary sector organisations steps to include sexual orientation along side other equality strands has experienced two major drives: first, pressure from LGB campaigning groups and trade unions from the 1980s onwards and second, the influence of legislative and policy developments following the election of a new Labour government in 1997.

- Within private sector organisations, approaches to equality and diversity and the inclusion of sexual orientation had also been influenced by corporate business objectives, with differences evident between US and European owned organisations.

- A variety of approaches to equality and diversity were evident in the case study organisations including: legal compliance; workforce diversity and inclusion; community diversity; moral and social values and business and market factors. While distinctive in their focus they are not mutually exclusive and there were examples of more than one approach being incorporated into strategy and policy approaches.

- All the case study organisations had taken a number of the steps recommended by Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme such as producing written policies and establishing LGB groups/networks. Policy and practice development varied across sectors in other areas such as pension provision and the monitoring of sexual orientation.

Chapter 4:   Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers: sexual identity and work

4.1   Work and career choices

There was evidence from the case study and key informant interviews and focus groups that the sexual orientation of respondents had influenced their work and career choices in a wide variety of ways as illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Factors influencing the work and career choices of lesbian, gay and bisexual employees
- Moving from school to work   - Type of work   - Choice of sector   - Organisational culture   - Workplace culture   - Geographical location   - Gender and equality politics   - Negotiating identity(ies) at work

4.2   Moving from school to work

The difficulties still facing young people coming out at school and work, were evident from the focus groups held with people aged 16-22 and 24 case study interviews with people aged under 30.

Key informants spoke of the "massive homophobia in schools" and FE colleges and the difficulties facing teachers in challenging it (THT key informant). This included the language commonly used in schools, which can have an effect on how LGB people feel about themselves, particularly when the term 'gay' is commonly used to signify 'dysfunctional, retro, old-fashioned'. Homophobic bullying as an issue has been acknowledged by the Department for Education and Skills, which has produced guidance[26], but it is proving very difficult to eradicate, according to representatives of Schools Out, the organisation that has campaigned for LGB equality in schools for 30 years, and the NUT teaching union.

In fact schools were described as 'dangerous' places for both LGB staff and pupils (NUT LGBT key informant). However, it was felt that the emphasis put on

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[26] Department for Education and Skills (2000) *Don't Suffer in Silence*, DFES Publications, London.

tackling the problem of homophobic bullying of pupils would be an 'important driver of change because schools will need to somehow address to those pupils' needs' (NUT LGBT key informant). The implications are that this more open discussion of sexuality will enable LGB teachers to be more open and supported. Key informants expressed concern that LGB young people may not continue into further or higher education to the same degree as their heterosexual peers because of the negative experiences they have had in education, and this means that many may not be fulfilling their potential in terms of careers or employment.

Members of the young LGB focus groups all talked of their experiences of homophobia and bullying in schools and colleges and the impact it had had on their self-image, confidence and studies.

> Well, I came out two years ago at school and it was pretty bad. I was like bullied for two years. **(Gay man, aged 16, London)**

> Comments from the guys didn't bother me because that was just guys being guys. I mean, it shouldn't be that way but it doesn't bother you because when you've heard it about a million times you get to know it all and it's just, you don't think that is so important for you. But the certain individual…did bother me because I don't really need someone who I thought was a friend commenting on my sexuality with loads of others. So I mean, that did bother me and affected my studies because I was quite angry and filled up about that individual. And I didn't go to school for quite a while because I was so angry with that individual. **(Gay man, aged 17, London)**

As they moved from education to work, some were working in part-time jobs, others were moving into what they hoped would be careers within retail, local government, social services, the NHS, cultural and IT sectors. Sexuality was identified as a factor in terms of where to work. Most of the focus group participants had some awareness of the Employment Equality (SO) Regulations (2003) but none had heard of the Stonewall Equality Index nor the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme. The consensus was that in this 'day and age ' sexuality shouldn't matter.

> I think if you went out worrying about your sexuality and whether you could get this job then in a way you are kind of limiting yourself in what you are going to do. If you go out with that attitude then you are going to attract that… obviously there is some areas where it might be better for working for gays. But retail is obviously a good industry, it's very gay friendly. **(Gay man, aged 19, London)**

However, a majority had already experienced homophobia at work and were aware of friends who had. For example in retail and restaurant chains and social services.

> Oh, it was just, every time I walked past it was "Here comes the queer" and all that so certainly I weren't putting up with it…I just left the job and started a new one **(Gay man, aged 19, London)**

> I used to get grief because where I worked previously was an ethnic minority children's home and I got dismissed after nine months for being a gay man and they said it was not suitable for being working with young children. **(BME gay man, aged 20, London)**

Such negative experiences can result in feeling excluded from many areas of employment;

> And the thing about it is a lot of gay people end up doing bar work or something like that. Or similar jobs to that because you can't do other jobs, you can't do some because I've got a friend who does office work who got it rough so badly. For instance, you can't do normal jobs, it's like – To me society looks at gay people as disabled still. It really is horrible. Because certain jobs you can't do. You can't go to certain areas because they are heavy homophobic, you can't use certain job classes because you might be considered, homos being considered paedophiles, so you really are technically disabled because society won't allow you to do certain jobs. **(Gay man, aged 17, London).**

And most took the view that they could not be out at work.

> It depends on who I am talking to. If I am starting to get to know the person I can see them as an individual rather than a larger group, then I can assess how far I can trust them with my private life. And my life, I came out to my last boss and she, I think she completely overlooked it to be honest. I think she was really good about it. But yes, there are times when I think right, I will skip over that section what I did last weekend or whatever. **(Lesbian, aged 19, London)**

However, for those committed to a career, a few were prepared to be more demanding of their employers.

> I want to work in child protection so I am aiming for child protection. I don't, I got to the point now where I say I am gay, if you don't like it, it's your problem, not mine. **(BME gay man, aged 20, London)**

Evidence from young LGB people from the case studies organisations was more positive, nearly two thirds (60.9%) of the 24 people aged under 30 were out to

everybody at work, a third (33.3%) to some, with just two participants opting to be out to a few or nobody (8.3%). Although, difficulties had been experienced at school and prior to working with the case study organisations, young LGB people reported more positive work experiences within the case studies. A key finding was that those who had come out at an early stage in their career, for example, during their training or induction period felt able to do so in part because the case study organisation had made efforts to emphasise equality policies in recruitment campaigns and set an equal opportunities environment during recruitment events or inductions for new staff. In addition to attracting staff and encouraging them to come out, the 'gay friendly' environment was also cited as important for retention.

> The company is very politically correct, I feel safe under management, we have the LGBT group… I enjoy my job and that keeps me at [the company], the atmosphere being nice inevitably does also keep me at [the company]. If I moved to a new workplace and the atmosphere was hostile, that would be unbearable. **(BME gay man, aged under 30, Private sector, London)**

The experience of working in an organisation striving to have 'gay-friendly' policies and practices had also raised expectations. Thus respondents were unlikely to accept anything less from their current or future employers. This young gay man was clear that he would remain 'out.'

> Yes, I would. I wouldn't go back into the closet under any circumstances. So I would be open about being gay and I would expect that people wouldn't bother me. **(Gay man, aged under 30, Private sector, London)**

4.3   Type of work

One experience was that the culture of particular professions had provided the basis for an affirming and safe environment, illustrated for example by the experiences of two lesbians who had chosen social work and youth work. In contrast a gay male local authority worker described how he would like to have been a children's librarian but he felt that being a single gay man had created a barrier to working in a profession involving children.

> It was a very positive and dynamic debate around discrimination and prejudice and anti-discriminatory practices and so actually as a social work student and then as a social worker it is a very kind of validating place to be as a lesbian. And well, as a lesbian, and as a woman and whatever other types in terms of identity politics. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, London)**

> When I got into youth work and I found it was a place where sexuality, sexual orientation was discussed openly, certainly at university, not

necessarily always out in the field….that's I think one of the reasons why I knew it was the kind of the right place for me to go, it was one of the first places I felt completely safe. **(Lesbian, Voluntary Sector, Yorkshire)**

4.4 Choice of sector

A majority of respondents admitted that when starting out in their careers prior to 2000 they had not really expected a sector or organization to be 'gay friendly.' However over time some had been drawn to the public sector because of its equal opportunity policies and the safety and security it appeared to offer. This was illustrated by the choices made by two local authority workers:

Obviously with being gay, I tend to like to think that I've got that little bit extra fallback if anything happens. I think that's the main reason why I've worked for the universities and for the council. You tend to have a bit more job security. I have worked at smaller companies and you just don't seem to get on as far in my opinion. And you can never be sure if there is any sort of discrimination there. And if there is, what sort of legal implications that is going to have if   anything happens. So I like the job security and knowing that there is a   policy in place, you know, if anything happens. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, Yorkshire)**

But the other reason why I thought I could make it through the council was that whilst it didn't then have any policy on gays and lesbians in the equal opportunities policy, I did know it was an equal opportunities employer so I thought that's one of the other reasons. Because it's public services…so it was a combination of all these factors that I ended up working for (the) council. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

4.5 Organisational culture

A different experience was of moving on because the culture of an organisation or working environment was difficult. This was associated with both white collar and blue-collar professions. For example, one gay man spoke of the 'macho' environment of engineering whilst another referred to the isolation he experienced within a private sector sales environment which led to him seeking a change. However, an alternative view was that it was really only possible to make a judgment about the culture of an organisation once you were there.

I was working within a sales environment which was very male dominated and quite kind of, macho and aggressive in that sense. So I didn't identify with a lot of people that were around me and I didn't socialise with any of the people around me so I felt quite isolated and I didn't have a lot of people there that I could talk to or call my friends or

I would speak to about what I had done at the weekends or anything like that because I didn't necessarily feel I identified with them. So that was probably one of the things that prompted me really to (leave). (**Gay man, Public sector, London)**

It's not until you are actually within that organisation currently that you actually find out whether or not what they say is backed up by action. So it's almost that, if that is truly a success factor in your decision making process then what you have to do is try and find people who work within that company to be able to go yourself to that company. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

4.6 Workplace culture

Another gay man reflected on the way in which being comfortable about his sexuality in the workplace had influenced his choice of workplaces.

I suppose there were probably certain places that I wouldn't really want to work… I don't think I would really want to …work in the factory environment or, not necessarily an all-male environment…it's not something that I would choose to do. It's not my career path, it's something I don't particularly want to do because I don't think I would feel particularly comfortable… I wouldn't be able to…talk about my private life as much as I possibly can do where I work at the moment and where I've worked in the past. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

4.7 Geographic location

Geographic location had been a factor in the career paths and work choices of respondents in different ways. A number had chosen to move to what they perceived as 'gay-friendly' cities like London or Brighton in the south of England or Manchester in the north in order to seek a work/life balance whereby they could live, find work and seek 'social inclusion' in a city with a gay community. This might be done by moving job or seeking a transfer within an organization. Others chose to stay in what they perceived as a gay friendly area and so would not seek a transfer elsewhere. For example a number of respondents working in London were clear that their career paths had been influenced by their decision to stay in London.

One BME LGB man talked of his strong desire from an early age to obtain a transfer within his organisation from Leeds to London and the important 'turning point' it had been for him personally and professionally. As a BME and a gay worker he felt that his working environment was quite hostile and that prospects for him in the Leeds office were limited.

> Straightaway I felt the environment was much more relaxed… beginning to feel more comfortable just being myself. Although I didn't really come out, strangely. I think everybody knew. And I genuinely believe people do know anyway after a while. You don't have to force it down, you know, I think people just know. Just be yourself and people will find out. **(BME Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Not all LGB people wished to move 'south,' For example, two gay men explained that they had relocated from small cities in the midlands to jobs in the public and private sectors in Leeds, Yorkshire so that they could be in a place where they felt more comfortable about their sexuality.

> [Where I lived before] was a very sort of seedy, backstreet, hidden away gay scene, whereas in Leeds it's very integrated and the majority of my friends are straight so I enjoy being able to go out basically where I am comfortable and where they are comfortable and that was one of the massive factors for deciding to come to Leeds. Not for the job but for the city itself and the job came along. (**Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

It was suggested that rural isolation might be compounded for those with 'multiple identities'.

> Regard [disabled LGB organisation] do get contacted occasionally by people who are out there in the sticks or in a non-metropolitan area where talk of diversity or equality hasn't even entered the vocabulary of the organisation or employer. I think a lot of disabled people find it easier not to be out because society doesn't think that they might want a relationship of any kind let alone a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender relationship. **(Disabled Lesbian, key informant, London)**

4.7   Gender and equality politics

Women respondents described ways in which their commitment to, and involvement in, feminist and equality movements had influenced their work and career choices. For example one lesbian working in the communications industry had spent the early part of her working life in manual trades when there had been a push by feminists to establish themselves in what had traditionally been male occupations, others talked of seeking work in the fire service as opportunities for women had opened up, whilst the early career of another lesbian prior to moving into local government had been spent in feminist based community organisations where being a lesbian was a 'positive' advantage. Another lesbian who had always worked in voluntary organisations and in local government explained that for a significant part of her career she had effectively been a 'professional lesbian'.

I've worked about twelve years as a kind of professional lesbian if you like. So worked for lesbian and gay organizations…I got the job because of my sexuality, it's been about different projects whether it's research on young lesbians and gay men or working as a lesbian and gay officer in different local authorities about diversity and equalities policies… did I apply for jobs, did I go for jobs because of my sexuality or did that have any impact in terms of my perception of those organisations? Yes, absolutely. But it was because in those days there were a lot of projects where they were funding either short-term or longer-term and I was lucky enough to get jobs in that sector. So as I say it's sort of referred to shorthand as a professional lesbian if you like. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

4.9   Negotiating identity(ies) at work

BME respondents and respondents with disabilities and key informants from BME and disability groups talked of the complexity of dealing with multiple identities at work. A number of LGB BME workers made the choice not to be out at work.

I think what happens with sexuality is that it's much easier for it to just be brushed aside because it is something that you can hide. I cannot hide the fact that I am [BME], I cannot hide the fact that I am a woman. But the other issue I can just not address it **(BME Lesbian, private sector, London)**

For others, being a member of the LGB and BME communities, meant that dealing with their identities could be a juggling act.

So I've had to kind of like juggle this thing, do I juggle being black first, then my sexuality? Or do I deal with the issue of challenging racism in the workplace and my sexuality. So it's like dealing with the homophobic experience from a BME premise. **(BME lesbian, key informant, London)**

For some this meant moving away from the geographical area where their family lived to seek work, not wanting to work in the family business and seeking work in organisations that had a good equal opportunities record. For Asian LGB people, the situation was described as complex,

Not only being gay, you know, you are Asian, you are a minority within a minority. But then, you know, being Asian, gay and Muslim you are a minority within a minority within a majority. And also coming out always whether your family are going to be supportive or not….in terms of how the family behave towards you. **(BME gay man, key informant, London)**

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For others who had made the decision to come out and take on an active role in both the LGB and BME communities, it could be a huge relief, particularly where their family and friends remained supportive.

> It's been incredibly rewarding and also it is supporting of me of me in terms of my identity. Yeah, It really has, I think. Yeah…because of the work I have done, I have had to go public. And so by being public and visible and people knowing me and relating to me from that position supports my identity. And also it means there is nowhere for me to hide. So if there is anything I will deal with it. **(BME gay man, key informant, London)**

Respondents talked of the need to ensure that both racism and homophobia is taken on in the LGBT and BME communities, whilst also recognising the importance of support from within the BME communities.

> A lot is said about homophobia in the Black communities, but the reason that's an issue for Black LGB people is precisely because that's the community they need to go to for support. Because of the racism they face in wider society, that is the place they get support. **(BME gay man, key informant, London)**

Disabled LGB workers also talked about the difficulties of feeling isolated from both disabled and LGB communities, so leading to the values of an organisation like Regard.

> Disabled lesbians and gay men felt that there was no inclusion both from the disability community recognizing the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender disabled people and from the gay and lesbian community, there was also no recognition that people with disabilities or impairments existed, let alone getting physical access to clubs, there just wasn't the recognition that we existed **(Disabled lesbian, key informant, London)**

Respondents talked about being 'out' about both their disability and sexual orientation. One informant described how she saw her own identities intersecting:

> I am the sum of all my parts, not necessarily lesbian all the time, that's not my focus, or having an impairment, obviously it's something I live with day by day, so it has to be a focus of my life, but is a question of kind of meshing these together **(Disabled lesbian, key informant, London)**

In a few cases, respondents were 'out' about their disability but not their sexual orientation at work or vice versa. In most cases respondents described

discrimination on grounds of a disability as having a more immediate impact on their work experiences and their work choices than their sexual orientation.

> With every person that you meet you are trying to work out what you need to do to make them, to understand what their reactions are going to be and to make sure that they are comfortable so that you can be comfortable. So you know, the scenario with me being gay, you know, if I feel that that person couldn't cope with that, especially when let's face it I don't go to meetings and sit there and say 'Hi, I manage to work for x and I am gay'…you know it has to come about in a roundabout way. It's not something I broadcast. But the disability is like different because it broadcasts itself **(Disabled gay man, Private sector, London)**

Respondents did however want to see sexual orientation being given the same status as the other equality strands.

> I want it to have the same status as my gender, as my ethnicity, my disability, because I am disabled as well. I want it to be given the same status. I don't want it to be an exception that I have to bring into the conversation. **(Disabled gay man, Voluntary sector London)**

Among the respondents some chose to be active in the LGBT group only, others were active in both LGBT and disabled workers workplace groups. One lesbian described her membership of both groups, noting with regret that the disabled workplace group was 'all straight' whereas the LGBT group was 'all guys'.

> I feel as though I ought to go to both actually. In a sense the Workers with Disabilities group is more proactive in that we want change and we want it yesterday. You know, how dare they forget us, you know, and they are doing a survey to look at diversity within the organization and completely dismiss disability, so you know we were jumping up and down quite high….I want more of a social thing with the LGBT group. I am being honest, that's how I kind of see it really but I mean if people do need support of course, I would be there for anybody. **(Disabled lesbian, key informant, London)**

Key points

- A range of factors had influenced the work and career choices of LGB respondents including: the transition from school to work; type of work; choice of sector; organisational and workplace culture; geographical location; gender and equality politics and negotiating identity (ies) at work.
- Young respondents (aged 16 – 22) had experienced homophobia and bullying at schools and colleges which had affected their self-image, confidence and studies.
- There was some awareness of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 amongst young respondents (aged 16 – 22) but not of Stonewall employment initiatives.
- Young respondents (aged 16 -22) generally felt that they were unable to come out at work and in some cases felt excluded from particular areas of employment, though there was also evidence of a willingness to challenge possible employer prejudice and stereotyping.
- LGB respondents (aged under 30) who had come out early in their careers had felt able to do so because of equality initiatives undertaken by case study employers and cited experience of a 'gay friendly' environment as a key factor in relation to retention and future career expectations.
- The culture of some professions was cited by respondents as the basis for an affirming and safe environment, though there was also evidence that respondents had felt excluded from certain career paths.
- There was evidence that some respondents had been drawn to the public sector because of equality policies and employment security.
- Macho cultures within both white collar and blue-collar professions had led to some respondents, particularly gay male respondents moving on from or avoiding particular organisations and workplace environments.
- Geographic location had influenced the career paths of respondents in various ways including moving to 'gay friendly' cities and other places where they felt more comfortable about their sexuality.
- A particular experience described by some lesbian respondents was the impact of their commitment to, and involvement in, feminist and equality politics on their career and work choices over time.
- BME LGB respondents reported a range of experiences including: juggling multiple identities; seeking work way from family areas and businesses and the importance of racism and homophobia being challenged by both LGB and BME communities.
- Disabled LGB respondents reported experiences of isolation and exclusion from both LGB and disabled communities and of having to make decisions about whether to come out about both sexuality and disability.

Chapter 5:   Lesbian, gay and bisexual Workers: Sexual identity within organisations

5.1   Coming out at work

Within our sample of LGB people working for good practice employers, just over half (57.8%) of the respondents were out to everyone at work. A third (33.8%) were out to some people, while 8.4% said that they were out to very few people or nobody at work. Nearly one in 10 (9.5%) of the male respondents said they were out to very few or nobody at work compared to 6.8% of the women respondents. As discussed in Section 2.3.11, a higher percentage of our respondents were out than in other quantitative surveys of LGB respondents. Figure 5.1 indicates the profile of respondents by sector.

Figure 5.1: LGB Respondents 'Out at Work by Employment Sector
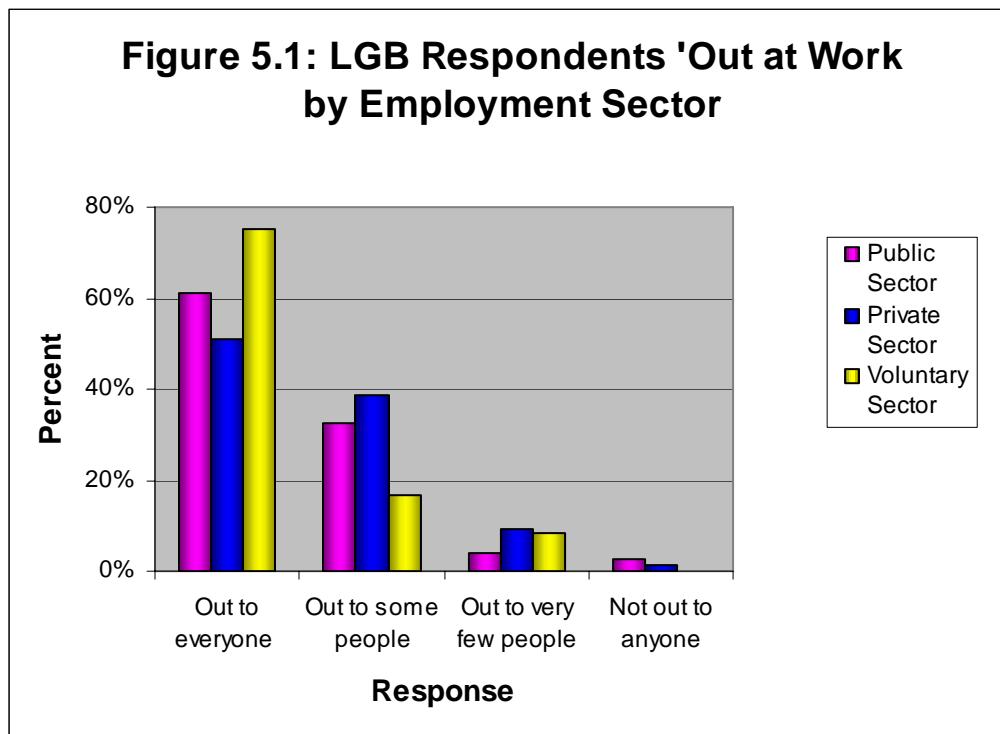
Amongst those respondents who were out at work there was a multiplicity of experiences and motivations. Coming out could happen at the start of employment or could happen gradually.

> There is no manual on coming out at work. 'This is what to look for, these are the signs to look for' story….it would be nice if there was some sort of manual that you could read. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

5.2   Coming out from the start

One type of experience was for respondents to come out immediately on joining an organisation or even earlier, through both formal and informal announcements. For example one lesbian who was also disabled disclosed at her interview because she felt she 'need(ed) to deal with it there and then'. Two men working in the fire service had also chosen to come out early in their employment. One came out during the training period and on arrival at his first station, whilst the other did not come out until he was posted to a station and on reflection felt that not coming out during the training period had caused him problems.

> I roared out. I mean I trained, there were four, in fact there were five of us when we started, me and four girls…and, I think it was the second week we went out for a drink and we were sat there all chatting away and I mean, they are a really good group, four very nice ladies I was with and I think I basically sat there   with a pint of beer and said 'Oh, by the way, just so you all know, I am a poof' and that was it, they all went 'Oh, alright then'. That was my training, I think the Watch, kind of things filter, you know, and of course as anywhere things go through the grapevine so people kind of knew and I mean I was quite open when I finished training and I got my posting to (that) Watch, I kind of quite quickly made it known that it was true. **(Gay man, Fire service)**

> I think as a gay man going into my station, being a gay man and like letting everyone know, immediately, unlike I did in training. In training I was quiet about it, so it caused me problems, whereas I went to station, the first thing I said to my officers, because my officers' role in terms of equality is to protect me, so I immediately told them and they said 'Can we tell the rest of the Watch?' and I said 'Yes'. And… you spend so much time with people, we do two nine hour days and then two fifteen hour nights, you are together for that time constantly. It's not something that you can hide. And if you did, it would be a huge betrayal, which is, you trust somebody with your life but you are not going to trust them with your sexuality. **(Gay man, Fire service)**

5.3   Coming out gradually

More commonly respondents described coming out at work as a 'gradual', 'organic' or 'natural' process as illustrated in Table 5.1. Typically this would not necessarily involve announcing their sexuality directly but letting it 'slip' into workplace interactions over time. A gay man working in a communications company described the way in which he 'drifted into coming out' through his involvement in his trade union's LGB group. One lesbian described the experience as enabling people to draw their own conclusions rather than coming out.

I didn't come out at work, I just am who I am so I never say 'actually I am gay'. It's if I talk about my partner and what I do. So I can't say I have actually ever said to somebody 'Well, actually I am gay', you know, it's just if I talk about me and my partner did this at the weekend, I would use her name as simple as that. People can take it how they want really. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, London)**

Table 5.1: Experiences of coming out gradually
• Coming out on an individual basis to work colleagues • Putting out signals to other lesbian, gay and bisexual people • Dropping a partner's name into workplace conversations • Making gay references in workplace conversations • Displaying pictures in the office • Coming out through trade union involvement

A gay man working in a local authority explained how he came out to another gay man through implicit conversational references which were not picked up by others:

At that point, yes, people were beginning to know that I was gay. Possibly helped by the fact that there was a very out gay person in the project. As soon as I had the first meeting with the new team and you know, it was like, how are you finding [it here] and the office had moved…and he goes 'The shopping is terrible'. I thought ah, okay. Right. And so very quickly I sort of made a comment to him that meant that if he was gay he would know what I was talking about. And if he wasn't, well, it had probably slipped him by. And he said 'Oh, oh, I see'. And so that was quite good knowing that there was someone else there. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

The experiences of two lesbians in another local authority illustrate how more explicit conversational references form part of the process of coming out gradually:

Or I may make a gay reference or something. If people ask me about my social life, I play in a lesbian and gay (sports) team in the (gay) olympics and (the council) knows about this and I get extra time to go off. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

I didn't at the interview. But thereafter I was out. And …the way I am out is to not kind of, say oh, by the way [I'm a lesbian], I just kind of slide it into conversation fairly early on, in every conversation that I have. And I have pictures around the office. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

One of the most common references that respondents had used as part of the coming out process was to mention their partner. For example a lesbian working in banking described how initially she had disguised the gender of her partner but then decided she no longer wanted to do so.

> I played the pronouns game, you know, you come in after the weekend and people ask you what you've done and you know 'Oh, we did this and my partner did that', you   know, and never saying she or anything. And I just thought no, I am bored with this game, I don't want to do that. And yeah, as I say, so having been in the publishing company where everyone who was interested knew, you know, then I just thought no, I am not going back in the closet just because I am moving jobs. So I didn't. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

5.4   Being outed by others

Respondents described a range of scenarios in which others had played a part in their coming out in the workplace, both maliciously and non-maliciously. At one end of the spectrum this was a relatively benign process. People assumed and accepted that colleagues would talk to others and that their sexuality would become known via such interaction. For example a lesbian working in a communications company explained how others talking was an extension of the gradual process of coming out.

> I gradually came out to various people in my group, like the guy I was buddied with. There was mainly the guys I was buddying with, once I got to know them after a few months I came out to them. Came out to a couple of other people who were on my group. Made the assumption that they probably talked to everybody else, didn't really talk a lot about that, there was another woman who was a dyke who was working in one of the other groups based where I was and we used to see each other when we went out sometimes, which was quite funny. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

A gay man working for a local authority described the way in which this had happened between jobs over time and accepted it as inevitable that people would talk.

> And I've moved from Leeds down to London within the same department and word had come…round so whether I liked it or not it was known. It's office gossip, isn't it? It's the grapevine. Coming back to Leeds, changing over from civil service and coming here, again, it was sort of, it was kind of, I suppose it was like a natural process really. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

At the other end of the spectrum, being outed could be a painful and uncomfortable experience. For example, one lesbian who worked in a communications company had come out herself to a group of people with whom she felt comfortable, but had then been outed by other people who bore a grudge against her.

> Everybody who looked at me, apart from the people that I was in, that group of people, they all looked and there was lots of sniggering and giggling and backbiting and, you know, pointing and it was very uncomfortable for a while. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

A gay man working in a manufacturing company explained that he had 'never been out or in', in that if anybody had asked him he would say he was gay. However, he had effectively been outed on to occasions. The first was when a colleague had told someone and it had spread with very damaging consequences for him.

> I was outed by somebody. By a work colleague. And it was a really bad time. It was my worst time in my life...I had problems every day. I'd just get bolts chucked at me, people would just refuse to work with me, it was just awful. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Subsequently he was transferred and things improved but then he was effectively outed by the fact that his lifestyle was different from that of his colleagues and because his name was discovered on the company's lesbian and gay website.

> So they, sooner or later they figured it out, you know, he must be gay. And I was on the gay and lesbian website and somebody had seen it. And again I was outed by that. And I had so many problems, so many problems. And I'd spent a couple of years in this plant. And I was outed just by my lifestyle. Because it wasn't, they didn't quite accept my lifestyle. It was because I was different. The fact that I didn't have a girlfriend. I didn't talk about girls, I didn't swear so much. I was a bit snob, that's what I was, a bit of a snob. But I weren't, I just wasn't that way inclined, you know. And I had a lot of problems. The main problem I had was being bullied and picked on. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

5.5 Motivations for coming out

> I have a firm belief that if all gay people had little pink horns then we wouldn't have homophobia because there would be so many people who would have pink horns. The difficulty about it is it's a personal choice. It's what people are comfortable with and whether or not they see it as anybody else's business. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector)**

Respondents described a variety of factors which had influenced their decisions to come out. One set of factors related to the culture of the organisation. A lesbian working in a communications company described how a change in the culture of the company influenced her decision to come out:

> And so [the company] was starting to change its image and I think it started to attract into the business a different type of person. Because before like me people viewed [the company] as being very stolid and bureaucratic and lumbering and taking a long time to do anything and not very responsive and very civil servant-ish really. And that was changing. I mean, [the company] is a huge beast and it takes a long time for it to move but it was starting to really change. So younger, more dynamic people were coming in. And I think what they brought with them as a more open-mindedness. So…that made it easier to be open. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

A second set of factors related to a range of personal circumstances which had influenced their decision to come out at a particular stage in their employment as illustrated in Table 5.2:

Table 5.2: Personal circumstances influencing a decision to come out
• The start of a new relationship   • When breaking up with someone   • When moving in with a same sex partner   • When having a child

For example, a lesbian working at a charity who had previously not been out at work explained how meeting a new partner influenced her:

> I found someone, I thought I found somebody that I would like to share my life with. And she actually made me come out more than what I normally would come out. She made me come out more. Like I was doing more things and I was more in the public eye if you like. And I sort of said right…I sort of come into work and told them at work that I was gay. But she actually gave me that little push, I think, it was like her…saying that you need to sort of come out, you need to know yourself. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, London)**

A lesbian working in banking who had previously only been out to other lesbians in the company decided that because her partner was having a baby, she need to out herself to her boss:

> Maybe yes, I mean the outing happened just last year. So very recently and to selected people, mainly my boss. I mean the official outing with

> my boss because we had the baby coming and…so I decided that I should really tell them what my situation was. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

A further range of circumstances related to circumstances at or around work as illustrated in Table 5.3. These included coming out to new colleagues as a result of turnover in the workplace, which could also be an uncomfortable experience.

> I am slightly less out now than I was in the previous group. Partly that is because there is quite a turnover of people in the group I am now in, so as quickly as you come out, then they disappear. And then there is new people coming in. (**Gay man, Private sector, London**)

> The only times when I do feel uncomfortable is when somebody new comes and they obviously don't know and then other people around them start talking about things. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, Yorkshire)**

Table 5.3: Work related circumstances influencing a decision to come out
- Coming out to new colleagues as a result of turnover within the workplace   - Coming out when moving from one workplace or job within the organisation to another   - Coming out in a work related social situation

Coming out was also described as a continual and repetitive experience as a result of job mobility within the organisation. A further work related experience which resulted in respondents coming out was via interaction with colleagues in work related situations. Indeed, for some respondents the absence of such social interaction was a barrier to coming out.

> It's not something [you would say in a meeting] If you had a face to face meeting and you had like an hour with them, there is so much to say, it's more something you'll say when you go out for a drink. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London**)

Respondents also described a variety of different motivations in relation to disclosure as summarised in Table 5.4. At one end of the spectrum there were those who felt quite relaxed and would never consider lying about their sexuality, whilst for others the burden of hiding or even lying about their sexuality became greater over time, to a point where they felt they had no choice but to reveal it to mitigate strain or prevent others talking about them.

> And I didn't feel any need to particularly hide it from one of my two senior bosses. It was pretty clear that most of the team knew, probably

just because I wasn't being quiet necessarily, so there was a gradual period, where I outed myself. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

And then also the changes within myself. I got to a point where I didn't want to have to lie or prevaricate about who I am and so I decided I wasn't going to. I wasn't going to shout it out to everybody but if I wasn't going to hide it either. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

They were saying 'Well, you wouldn't know what a gay bloke, they probably wouldn't want to shower with a straight bloke would they but we don't know because there's no-one here.' I put my hand up and said 'Well you could ask me' because I was getting a bit fed up with it because and they looked total shock and jaws dropped that someone, that someone who is not immediately obvious was in their midst. **(Gay man, Fire service)**

Table 5.4: Disclosure factors influencing a decision to come out
- The strain of not being out   - Finding it difficult to hide their sexuality over time   - Needing to talk about circumstances where their sexuality was relevant   - Not feeling the need to hide it   - Not wanting to lie   - To avoid rumours being spread   - Not wanting to repeat previous negative experiences of being in the closet

5.6   Level and extent of outness

It was common for those who were out to nevertheless be selective in terms of those they came out to. As Figure 5.2 indicates, respondents in our sample were less likely have come out to clients/customers and students. Most respondents across public, private and voluntary sectors were not out to clients, particularly teachers who did not feel 'safe' in terms of the reactions of pupils and parents. In the private sector, although company equality policies offered protection from discriminatory colleagues, this did not extend to clients. Respondents also made a distinction between being out in the organisation as a whole or in their individual workplace, though the dissemination of information and 'gossip' about their sexuality beyond the workplace was not something over which they had control.

Figure 5.2: To whom are you not out?
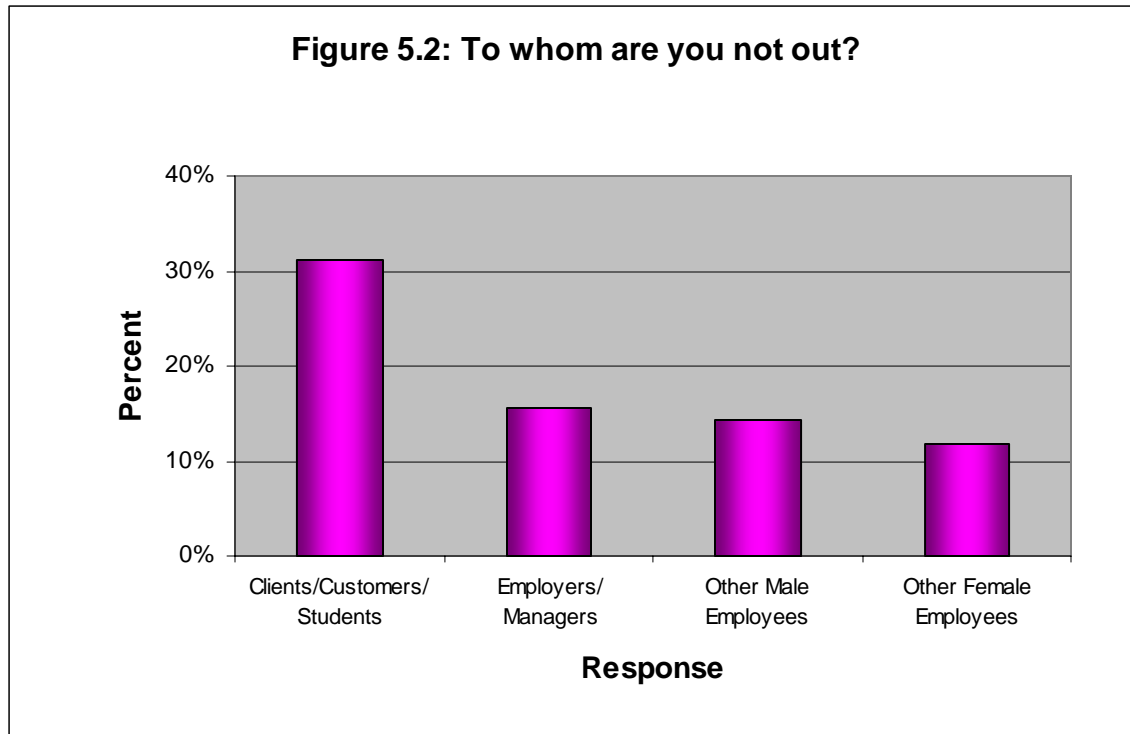
Respondents described a range of different experiences in relation to the level and extent of their outness. For those who had come out from the start, the process often involved a deliberate announcement. However, amongst those for whom the process of coming out was more gradual, a range of more subtle approaches were evident. A gay man in the fire service explained that whilst he would never lie when asked a direct question he did not make explicit announcements about his sexuality:

> So they just had to see me as who I was, I always decided that I'd never wear banners and sort of like walk in and say Hello, my name is….. and I am gay'. **(Gay man, Public Sector, London)**

Typically people in this category explained that they 'wouldn't go round telling everyone', but neither did they hide or deny it when asked. One gay man explained that although he wasn't fearful of revealing his sexuality, he wasn't 'deliberately out to anybody'. People therefore may not have been aware of his sexuality because the question hadn't arisen or because it might seem 'contrived' to mention his sexuality in conversation.

Respondents also described circumstances in which they made decisions about whether to come out to particular groups of people. For example, they might choose to be out to colleagues, but not to clients, customers or contractors.

> If I have a long-term relationship with colleagues then at some point irrespective of how things are I will come out to them. If it is a short-

term piece of work then I will probably make a decision based on what sort of people I think they are. Because it's not an absolute requirement for me to talk about my sort of personal self to them if it's just a short-term transaction or sort of thing I am going through. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Amongst male respondents there were some who felt more comfortable disclosing their sexuality to female colleagues, but were more likely to hide it from men.

But in terms of my own personal being out I don't ever make a point about it. I certainly wouldn't tell my boss if my boss was male. So my boss is now male and I wouldn't tell him. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

I have been hot desking around all different sort of different sections and also in previous employers as well, if I've been around certain straight men or the lad kind of types, I have been a lot more closed and private and not really willing to open up about my social life. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

For respondents working in social care environments either in the public or voluntary sectors, the issue about whether to come out to service users was always present. Whilst none of the organisations from which the respondents were drawn had specific policies in this area, one view was that sexuality was a private matter and that it was not necessary or even appropriate to disclose it. This could relate to perceived professional boundaries or to concerns about personal safety.

I had been his key worker for six years, and it was very clear to me that he was probably gay…and I remember a conversation I had with him, and he said 'why didn't you tell me you were gay, it would have made my life easier.' And I said 'Yes, but it would have made my life hell.' **(Gay man, Voluntary Sector, Yorkshire)**

I thought I don't want to blur the borders here. If you want to discuss issues around your sexuality then you need to go to (another group). So I just said okay, I will take you there and introduce you to that and you can speak to them about it because that's their arena. I will support you as a support worker and discuss issues about you but I don't want to discuss my sexuality with you but that was, that was, I mean, some workers do, some workers are quite happy to be open and discuss it with and tell people about their experiences and find the common ground but for myself I didn't feel I wanted to do that. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

> I have had one pupil in the whole time…and he wanted to ask a question but he was too scared to do it. He was like 'I will get in trouble' so I said 'You are not going to get in trouble for asking me a question, ask me the question if you want to' and then he said 'Alright then, are you a lesbian?…Then I asked myself why did I ask you to do that because I can't tell you. So stupid. I just, actually what I said to him was 'Would it matter if I was?' And he went 'Well, no' and I said 'Well then'. And it was just left there **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

In contrast respondents recounted positive experiences of coming out to service users, for example because it removed a potential barrier and ensured they wouldn't find out from other people.

5.7   What helps people come out?

Respondents described a variety of factors that had helped them to come out including as illustrated in Table 5.5. Some of these related to the organisations in which they worked, for example because of established equal opportunities policies or the perceived culture of the organisation.

Table 5.5: Factors which helped people come out
- The presence of an equal opportunities policy   - Feeling safer as a result of signals from the organisation   - The presence of an organisational LGBT group   - Getting involved in a trade union LGBT support network   - The presence of other LGB colleagues.   - The presence of senior LGB people

Another experience was of increased confidence to come out as a result of getting involved in a trade union group or network. For some respondents, the presence of other openly lesbian, gay or bisexual colleagues was important.

> I am not so sure I would have done it in my previous employment so here it was the fact that…other people were obviously out and certainly, you know, okay and it was happy and people were treated okay, it felt okay to be out here. And without any kind of reprisals. But as I say there seem to be quite a large number of staff who were obviously gay, that's men and women and out, so it didn't seem to be a problem at all. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire**)

5.8   The benefits of coming out

There was evidence from lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents that coming out provided both personal and organisational benefits as indicated in Table 5.6.

Personal benefits included feeling happier and more relaxed at work. This in turn enabled more openness and improved interaction with colleagues.

> I suppose it makes me happier. Happier in myself because, you know, I am not hiding what I am, I am not having to lie to people. Like I said earlier, you know, you can feel free to discuss anything. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, Yorkshire)**

> Yeah, I am not constantly having to think before I speak about my home life. Or what I used to do was not speak about my home life because it was easier than getting into a big confrontation, not confrontation but explanation when something didn't fit with what I'd said before. Covering my tracks and things like that. I am a lot more relaxed. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, Yorkshire)**

> And it also sort of strikes a better relationship with the people that I am talking with, when I don't have to hesitate anymore about how shall I phrase this. It has sort of helped me accept that it's all normal behaviour and the people in front of me are not going to be fazed by it and if they are, they won't make a deal about it. If they do make a deal about it, then I've got [the company] behind me should they get nasty. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire**)

Table 5.6: Benefits of coming out
• Happiness at work • Fosters openness • Enables interaction • Improves productivity

Such personal benefits were in turn perceived by some respondents to bring about organisational benefits in the form of improved productivity, which for one organisation had been evidenced by research.

> And this was such, [the company] commissioned a lot of research in the States…. which actually genuinely shows that there was a direct correlation between people who were out and their productivity. And you know, because so much of this stuff is common sense, that you know, if you can be yourself, rather than having to worry about putting energy into closeting and shielding, you know, it just makes sense. If people are more relaxed they are going to be more productive and more effective in their work. And actually there is going to be a better basis for trust and honesty. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

5.9   Choosing not to come out

As we have previously indicated our sample included lesbian, gay and bisexual people who had chosen not to come out or to come out to very few people. A range of reasons was articulated for such choices as indicated in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Factors which prevent people coming out
• Fears about job/career/promotion • Lack of senior LGB role staff • Temporary status of employment • Previous bad experiences • Respect for partner's wishes • Desire for privacy • Male attitudes/behaviours • Religious attitudes • Organisational culture

A key factor that prevented some respondents coming out, or had done within the past, was the fear that to be openly lesbian, gay or bisexual might hamper career opportunities.

> I think for me at this point in time I don't think there will be any detrimental effect. But I think that if I were, you know, more senior that could, that might be a problem. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

Respondents talked of compartmentalisation of their lives. Where no other employees were out, particularly at senior levels, there was a reluctance to come out because of its impact on career and working relationships.

> I don't know, a long time ago, I decided just to compartmentalise my life, you know, my personal life and my working life and I guess, that's the way to stay…. I would say I feel there would be a negative impact. But that's again my perception and that might be, because I don't know anyone else who is out in consulting, and especially at the top. Anybody, project managers, partners, etc. So I don't know how it will be perceived and I think all the people at that level are like, you know, married with children and grey hair. You know, so they seem kind of settled, so there is no reason to do it… and you never know how the customer will react, you know, because somebody in your team might let it slip sometime. **(BME Gay Man, Private Sector, London**).

A very real fear of coming out was expressed by men working in '100% male' workplaces. One respondent, who was also a trade union representative, when asked if he would like to be more open at work said:

> I would but I wouldn't…Yeah, I daren't. Because my credibility would go down the drain. And my [trade union] services which I can offer to everyone who needs them wouldn't materialise….Yes, I just have to close off. I can't afford to take risks…. You don't find anybody who walks around as an engineer, whether they are male or female, who says I am gay. (**Gay man, Private Sector, London)**

Other factors that prevented openness in the workplace related to organisational culture and attitudes including those held by particular groups of staff such as those with fundamental or evangelical religious beliefs.

> I can't put my finger on it. Because there were certain career paths for me mapped out, and they failed to materialise. And…. I know that in, that our previous director was a devout Christian, and I do feel that he, well I know that he said no to some of the career progression. And I am sure that's because of his Christian faith. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

> We've also got a strong kind of Christian contingent in our office which I feel manifests itself quite inappropriately in terms of like there's prayers, they used to have prayer meetings and stuff when I first started. This is not authorised by the managers. In fact the managers put a stop to it then someone brought in a quote from the Bible and like hang it up in the office and raised it in the team meeting so we could all, if ever we felt down in our job we could read this, you know, no, not in the office, thanks. This is work and this is not a church **(Gay man, Public sector, London).**

5.10   Ways of not coming out

Those who chose not to come out also employed a range of strategies to hide their sexuality for colleagues as described in Table 5.8. The most extreme strategy was to invent a partner of the opposite sex, whilst others described ways in which they had neutralised the gender of their partner, referred to by one respondent as 'playing the pronouns game'.

Some respondents who were out, but had not always been so, described strategies they had employed in the past. For one lesbian, this had involved deliberately behaving and dressing in ways which would make her appear straight, whilst for another it was conforming to people's expectations, which with hindsight she regretted.

Well, it's good. Because it's awful living, you know, a lie all your life. I lived a lie till I was thirty. And I wish sometimes I'd have come out sooner but I didn't because you just go with the flow what people expect, you know. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

Table 5.8: Ways of not coming out
- Pretending to have opposite sex partner   'Filtering and translating' experiences and information   - Playing the 'pronouns game' (re: gender of partner)   - Blending in through presentation and behaviour   - Conforming to people's expectations

A gay man who was also out to everyone described the strategy he had employed previously when the organisation had been less gay friendly as one of constantly 'filtering' and 'translating' experiences and personal information.

I am not conscious of having a layer of filter and translation. I think I have had that before and I am conscious that I think perhaps before the ten year period when I mentioned diversity was embraced I think I was much, I probably did have quite a layer of that. And I think personally that that is quite a common thing among gay people. A constant background process running to filter and translate as necessary. I am not conscious that I have that now. I don't feel I have had it for many years. I do think I did have it. At what point I dropped it I am not sure. Some years ago. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Key points

- Within our sample of 154 LGB people, just over half (57.8%) were out to everyone at work. A third (33.8%) were out to some people, while 8.4% said that they were out to very few people or nobody at work.
- LGB respondents who were out at work described a multiplicity of experiences and motivations in relation to the decisions they had taken.
- Coming out at the start of employment could involve both formal and informal announcements and was typically seen as a way of dealing with things to avoid potential future problems and dilemmas.
- The dominant experience of those respondents who were out at work was of coming out gradually over time. This encompassed various experiences and strategies including: coming out to individual colleagues; putting out signals to other LGB colleagues; referring to a same sex partner; making gay references in workplace conversations; displaying pictures for example of partners and trade union involvement.
- Respondents described a range of scenarios in which others had played a part in their coming out at work, both maliciously and non-maliciously. This was usually a benign experience which was described as inevitable and there was an acceptance that colleagues would talk to each other. However, less typically it was a painful and uncomfortable experience which involved both exclusion and harassment.
- Personal circumstances which led respondents to come out included: a new relationship; ending a relationship; moving in with a partner and having a child. Work related circumstances included: workplace turnover; an internal move; and interaction at a work related social situation.
- Motivations for coming out included: the strain of being in the 'closet'; not wanting to lie and wanting to avoid rumours being spread.
- Respondents commonly reported being selective about who they came out to. Most typically this involved not coming out to clients, customers or students for a variety of reasons. Gender was also a selection criterion.
- Factors which helped respondents to come out were equal opportunities policies; positive employer signals; the existence of LGB(T) groups and networks and the presence of LGB colleagues and LGB senior managers.
- Coming out was described by respondents as enabling a happy work experience; fostering openness and interaction and improving productivity.
- Factors which prevented people coming out included: fears about career progression; lack of visible senior LGB staff; temporary employment status; previous negative experiences; respecting a partner's wishes; desiring privacy; male attitudes and behaviours and religious attitudes.
- Strategies for hiding sexuality reported by respondents included inventing a partner; filtering information; neutralising the gender of a partner; modifying behaviour and conforming to perceived expectations.

Chapter 6:   Lesbian, gay and bisexual perceptions of organisational and workplace culture

Lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents offered detailed perspectives on organisational and workplace culture and the implications for them as LGB employees. Even within good practice organisations, a range of factors influenced culture and the ways in which culture and attitudes manifested themselves in both positive and negative terms for LGB workers (see Tables 6.1and 6.2).

Table 6.1: Factors influencing organisational and workplace culture
- Sector of organisation   - National origin of organisation   - Geographic location of organisation within UK   - Role models in senior positions   - Gender and male attitudes within the workforce   - Religious attitudes within the workforce   - Individual e.g. religious attitudes within workforce

Table 6.2: Manifestations of culture and attitudes
- Comfortable/uncomfortable experiences   - Visibility and invisibility of sexuality   - Discriminatory or aggressive language   - Fragmented/divided organisations/workforces   'Hierarchies' of discrmination   - Conformity and resistance to change   - Heterosexual norms   - Acceptability/unacceptability of homophobia

6.1   Sector of Organisation

Whilst there were similar perceptions across sectors, for example, in relation to the presence of heterosexual norms, the use of discriminatory language and the effect of male attitudes within the workforce, there was also evidence of differences across sectors. For example, the notion of a hierarchy of discrimination was more commonly associated with public and voluntary sector organisations, whilst amongst some private sector respondents there was concern that the way in which the organisation embraced LGB issues was rooted

more in a desire to reach the 'Pink Pound' than a wish to create an inclusive workplace for LGB employees.

6.2   National origin of organisation

Respondents with experience of working in global private companies described apparent variations between the cultures of American, and British or European based companies.

> There is a little bit more uptightness if you are British. [The American company] was obviously different from the second you walked in for a variety of reasons. One of which was there are some very senior women and I can count on one hand the female partners in [British based companies] globally. Now suddenly there are women all over the executive management of this company. It's an obvious difference. It's an obvious difference with the racial background in [the American company]. They don't have to say anything, they don't have to do anything. It's just a vast difference you feel walking in to this company **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

> [The bank] is sort of a gay and lesbian diversity equality kind of bank…. I think in some of the American investment banks they actually have representatives of that sort. Whereas I think [the bank] is more sort of European, sort of surreptitious. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

6.3   The influence of geographical location

There was a perception amongst some respondents in London of greater tolerance and inclusion within the capital than elsewhere in the country, including Leeds:

> The other thing is that in London, … a big cultural diversity. The people are just a bit more open-minded. I've got friends who are further out, especially in…county brigades, they have an awful time. And you know, it didn't get better it got worse. And getting involved with the union and the group didn't do them any favours whatsoever. And they thought that it would maybe back them up a bit but it didn't and it just became unworkable for them at the station they were at. **(Gay man, Fire service)**

> The cold Northerner, I mean, I am a Geordie, I am a Northerner, but yeah, definitely, you move away from, in fact that's not entirely fair, Manchester is fine. Newcastle is more or less okay now because it's quite a culturally diverse city now I think. But certainly places like

> Leeds, Sheffield they are not what I would say were warm welcoming and safe places for a gay person. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

However, for those wishing to stay in the North of England, Manchester, Newcastle, Blackpool and Leeds were perceived as good locations relative to smaller towns and cities.

> The move to come up to Yorkshire again, it was a main trigger. I was reaching a crisis point basically at work where I just couldn't be happy. And the environment wasn't that good. It was local government, a small council. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

6.4 Role models in Senior Positions

One view amongst respondents was that role models could play an important part in shaping the culture of an organisation. The extent to which there were openly lesbian, gay or bisexual people in senior positions within organisations was generally limited however.

> There were very few people who are actually within [the network] community who you would actually know of. A lot of people know of me because I am…all over the place and publicising stuff and being in [the company magazine] as much as I can. But there is very few people who would say 'Oh, I know that person, is he gay?'. So there is nobody senior I can think of who publicly is out. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Also important was the example set by senior managers who ensured corporate equality and diversity policy was embedded and that homophobic behaviour was unacceptable.

> Before the meeting and I made all the list you know, what I wanted to say…and before the meeting I met… the Director in the kitchen just picking up a coffee and she asked me how I am… and she said to me 'You don't have to worry, I am 100% on your side and I am not tolerating any disrespectful behaviour in the group and not any disrespectful language and I am going to sort them out'. I was ready to raise it ….I have to say that this Director she was talking to them first and she took the wind out of their sails immediately. She said '[the company] is a big, international, diverse company and inappropriate behaviour and language is not tolerated at all here…'. And after she was finished you know, I had hardly anything to say.'**(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

6.5   Gender and male attitudes within the workforce

Gender emerged as a key factor influencing the culture of organisations. A lesbian respondent in one local authority explained that gender, far more than sexuality, 'set the culture' of the organisation. Her viewpoint was echoed in the descriptions of respondents in other organisations. For example, a lesbian in the fire service and a gay man in the private sector discussed their experiences of working in a 'jokey' male environment:

> They are not taken in, they are not meant to be hurtful. They are taken in a jokey way, and a lot of that does go on. You just get the typical comments that you'd get anywhere really, I guess, working in a male environment. **(Lesbian, Fire service)**

> Blokes make jokes about anybody. But it's basically just jokes and there is very few that are really nasty about anything so whether he's Black, Jew, German, gay, whatever, it's all fair game, they have a joke, have a laugh but it's not malicious. So I am happy with that, I do exactly the same thing. **(Bisexual man, Private sector, London)**

In contrast to their relaxed acceptance of such environments a gay male firefighter explained that he felt the culture within the fire service was not conducive to coming out and when asked whether he would recommend other gay men to join, he suggested that anyone choosing to do so would have to be very robust:

> Only if I thought they were hard-headed enough to do it. If they were very, very secure and most gay men I know aren't secure enough. If they are very secure and very physical, then yeah, it's a great job, if they weren't, if somebody, if they got upset very easily by a few comments, don't go. **(BME Gay man, Public sector, London)**

LGB respondents were less likely to be out to male managers, particularly where male managers set a 'macho, heterosexist' culture.

> I will give you a scenario actually. I sat in an office much like this one with one wall which is a glass wall to the corridor and I was in a meeting with my boss and a young girl walked past the windows with blond hair and he stopped talking and stared. And I thought 'I know what he is going to say and I don't know what I am going to say back' and he said 'Sorry, that was obviously a distraction' or something like that and I remember saying 'Yes, I could see you were distracted' but I thought that for me that just said you know, I am really straight and I am a guy and just look at her she is really nice, isn't she. And that's the point where you start saying, I can't turn around to you and say,

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well, actually I am gay. **(Disabled Gay man, Private sector, London)**

6.6   Religious attitudes within the workforce

Some concerns were expressed by respondents about the presence of homophobic attitudes based on religious views. For example one gay man referred to the way in which he felt that debates within the media about religious hatred had contributed to the development of more 'subtle' forms of discrimination. Others expressed concerns about the way in which their organisation's 'Family friendly' policy agenda was being 'hijacked' by those with strong religious views which had resulted in LGB employees feeling sidelined and excluded.

Respondents talked of difficulties based on directly stated homophobic views as well as possible covert views, which although not expressed directly did become evident in other work-related discussions.

> I've only ever had a couple of times when people have actually verbalised their disgust about my sexuality and that was one by a Christian and one by a Muslim man and this was after work, so it was like a social but they'd never say it at work. It was religiously driven. Whereas you know, I've got a lot of Christian and Muslim colleagues here but they don't mention or say anything. And whether it's an issue for them, I don't know. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

> At one point I was sharing an office with a Christian woman but she was, sort of Born Again, sort of Evangelical Christian but…she was very accepting of me, it wasn't a difficulty. And I have encountered that attitude from some Christians in, not about me but you know, the field I work with now is in adoption and some children's social workers wouldn't consider lesbian or gay adopters for children they are looking for adopters for. So you know, I mean, I've had to challenge that in those circumstances really **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

6.7   Individual attitudes within the workforce

A common view amongst respondents across organisations was that the attitude of individual employees and managers played an important part in shaping the culture of workplaces within organisations.

> I'd say is that it depends on the people you work with. And you know, if your line manager is okay and supportive. Like I say I wasn't, when I first started working for Leeds, I had only just come out myself

anyway, so that was down to me. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, Yorkshire)**

You still get pockets of ignorance and pockets of discrimination, you can pass as many laws as you want but you can't change people's minds. You can make them work to a policy but that doesn't mean to say that they agree with it but they will work with it. And you will still always get pockets of nastiness. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

Certainly I have heard stories of other members of staff that have found it very difficult and other members of staff who would just not be out at work which I find very sad in an organisation where I feel so safe. And it just feels so wrong for one service to be in a place where you do feel safe and supported and someone to be in another one in the same organisation and not get that feeling. And my understanding of that has been that there have been a number of kind of old-school managers still around who are still part of the kind of [the organization] Victorian values image that I had initially when I first applied. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire**)

6.8   Comfortable or uncomfortable experiences?

There were variations in the extent to which respondents felt comfortable or uncomfortable within organisations and to which they perceived that colleagues were comfortable with references to sexuality. These variations existed both within and between organisations.

For example, a lesbian working in the banking sector explained that her comfort at work in part derived from the fact that colleagues adopted an inclusive stance that acknowledged her sexuality:

And sometimes things will come up, you know, items in the news, for example recently the civil partnerships and a number of people will actively take an interest and they will say 'Oh, are you going to do that? or 'Did you see that in the news?' or whatever it might be. So always, I sort of felt, you know, quite comfortable with that and people are obviously, feel certainly comfortable enough to talk about it or to ask after my partner or whatever. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

In one private sector company there were examples of people who felt comfortable and uncomfortable even within the same building. For example, a gay man described his experience at work as that of being in a 'comfort zone', whilst a lesbian described her need to wear 'an emotional suit of armour' to cope with being at work. Elsewhere within the same organisation, a gay man described how he felt it was unfair that socialising with work colleagues should

be used as performance criteria because he felt uncomfortable doing so due to the prevailing culture:

> I just don't, I've explained I don't feel comfortable, I find it too macho and that's probably not, you know, that is not a fair thing to be assessing someone on if they are not actually comfortable. Because the message kind of is, this is something you need to improve on and this is your problem. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Respondents also referred to experiences of colleagues displaying signs of discomfort when sexuality was openly discussed. For example a gay men in a local authority discussed his experience of dealing with one particular colleague in a small office environment. The evident discomfort displayed by the colleague in turn made him feel uncomfortable:

> I wouldn't say got uncomfortable, but I mean, if ever issues come up, you can tell when people tense up and you can tell when people are uncomfortable with it. As I would be uncomfortable if he was there and the issue came up as well. But that was really apparent because we all worked in a small office. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

6.9   Sexuality: Visibility or invisible?

A key issue which arose when respondents were asked about culture and attitudes within organisations was that of visibility and invisibility. For example in one local authority, respondents described different ways in which the issue of sexuality was rendered less visible by the actions of both politicians and workplace colleagues:

> The issue of sexuality is difficult, it's difficult to express. So consequently, there is a kind of message, an implicit message that sometimes seems to come from sections of the politicians that they don't really want to push this issue too much and I guess that does feed into how the organisation thinks about it. Because if you thought about race issues, you know, [the council] is very explicit in you know, talking about community cohesion, anti-racist. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

> That is also reflective of people's ideas around it's alright if you are lesbian or gay but don't talk about it, don't push it forward, it's a personal thing, that whole thing about it's a personal thing and not anything more than that so why should we ask you if you are lesbian or gay, it's your business. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

In contrast respondents in two voluntary organisations described the visibility of policy at both corporate and workplace levels:

I think the attitudes in the organisation, of the senior members of staff in the organisation and they are there pushing the support groups within [the organization]. Because it's not only us, there is [the LGB group] but there is also a BME group and there is also a disabled group, disability working group. So and because they are very keen on these support networks being in place, people are very open about it. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, London)**

It's always been okay. In fact here they have gay women and fellows who adopt so they are into that. I mean, if you look round there is posters about gays adopting and they do do that here. Which is good. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

6.10 Discriminatory or aggressive language

Language emerged as a powerful influence in respondents' descriptions of organisational and workplace cultures. In a school for example, the terms lesbian and gay were routinely used by pupils in a derogatory way albeit not always intentionally and concern was expressed that this was not challenged sufficiently:

You could spend your life. Every single day with things like 'Oh, that piece of work is gay' is not, you know, when they are being truly homophobic and you know when they are being, just using the term 'gay' because they haven't thought about it…we have never discussed this since I've been here. But.... we will tackle them if they were calling somebody gay or, I mean, one member of staff got called a lesbian on Tuesday. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London**)

However, as another respondent in a school explained, Section 28 had cast a long shadow over staff perceptions about what it was appropriate and possible to discuss:

It is really, it is very difficult though because I think, Section 28 has long-lasting effects and I think a lot of people still don't know what they are allowed to say and what they are not allowed to say. **(Lesbian, School, London)**

In the contrasting environment of a factory line within a manufacturing company, a respondent described his observations of the way in which the use of language, though not necessarily discriminatory, contributed to the 'toughness' of the workplace environment:

The line itself is a place which I think you have to be able to care of yourself, and that being gay on top of that just needs an extra requirement to take care of you. Now that's not covert language for saying you have to be able to beat somebody up quite easily but I think

> it's a robust environment where people will use tough language. I am not necessarily saying discriminatory language or prejudiced language but just a tougher environment. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Within the fire service there was a perception that equality and diversity policies had affected the public, but not necessarily the private, language of employees:

> So, I found it was the same with women or ethnic minorities. If they were going to be introduced 'Whoa, whoa, that is going to change our little group that we've enjoyed for so long, it's going to change it and it's going to be different now and we're going to have to be nice to people and have to moderate our language' but they sort of know you can't say that any more even though in private I'm sure they do. **(Gay man, Fire service)**

6.11 Fragmented and divided cultures

Respondents' accounts provide evidence of variations in culture within organizations, for example amongst different groups of employees or across departments and directorates.

> The brigade has a very interesting culture, I think it comes from the fact that there is that split between uniformed and non-uniformed and also the fact that we work in local government and there are the issues around political correctness and so on, so that's a very difficult question to answer on the basis that people now know..... there are very few people in the organisation that even if they were racist, sexist or homophobic would be foolish enough to express it. They will find ways either not to express it or to express it in ways that you couldn't actually put down to any of those -isms. **(Gay man, Fire service)**

> We are a number of organisations put together really, aren't we, because we've got marketing and communications and people that probably wouldn't take the same stance as children's services. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

6.12 'Hierarchies' of discrimination

Within local authorities and schools in particular, respondents observed that there could be a hierarchy of discrimination. For example in one local authority, a gay man described his perception of a more hesitant approach to dealing with homophobic discrimination than discrimination on grounds of race. A lesbian who had worked in a number of local authorities who felt that a hierarchy of discrimination also had an impact on policy implementation echoed this view:

> We [should] incorporate all forms of discrimination because this is as important to us as others, we need to address all of this and… mainstream, all the work that has been done with business units around the other areas, we have understanding at a local level but because age and sexuality weren't part of that they will always been seen as second class and need to catch up. And I still think there is a hierarchy of discrimination…we have had in the past sort of managed to support staff forums and it's always been quite difficult to get the lesbian and gay forum up there. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

Thus, although Section 28 was no longer on the statutes, it was felt by many of the local authority and school respondents that local authorities and schools were still much more 'cautious' in developing, resourcing and publicising work on LGB employment and service issues than was the case than their work on gender, race and disability. This was still seen as more 'politically sensitive' and a 'potential vote loser' than other equality strands. Respondents thought it was important that all forms of discrimination should be dealt with.

> We went to the Head and said we should have a meeting to discuss homophobia and she supported it really well and then we went back and sort of discussed it and thought well, we shouldn't be leading on it, you know, that's the same as only Black people should be dealing with racism. It is a corporate thing. So in a sense we passed it back to the school. It's a huge issue in the school…as well as taking on the hierarchy of –isms, you call someone a 'Black bastard' and you are out, there is no question about why you said it….I would say if you mapped out there is a definite hierarchy, being gay is well down there. There is lip service paid to it. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

6.13   Conformity and resistance to change

Within both the public and private sectors respondents expressed concern about the challenge of changing traditional cultures that were seen as resistant to diversity. For example one private company was described by a lesbian as having a 'culture of conformity' exemplified by a traditional approach to dress codes. The public sector too was described by some respondents as a difficult environment in which to implement new ideas sometimes associated with the attitudes of older male managers.

> It's a changing culture at the moment and I think it's having to change but I think there is a struggle with dinosaurs who are just holding on… and I think their attitude is quite inflexible. But I think they are all getting to retirement age really so I think attitudes are changing. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

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There is sections that the old boys networks, there's people that have been here for years and years and years that don't want to change, not bothered about changing or can sometimes just totally blank it out. **(Bisexual man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

6.14   Heterosexual Norms

Two accounts by lesbians in the private sector illustrated the ways in which heterosexual norms prevailed, though one acknowledged that this was gradually changing:

"Congratulations to so-and-so for getting engaged, congratulations to so-and-so for getting married, congratulations to so-and-so for having their first baby" or whatever. I just can't imagine like me going and saying 'Oh, my girlfriend and me are moving in together, can you put it on the people page, please'. That kind of thing. But that's not for the newsletter editor to do that, in a way something big has got to happen. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

Now, one of my big bugbears is I don't like the pressure of the Christmas dinner and dance. I think it used to be [a big thing] it's not so much now. I mean, I have never attended it. I think it's very difficult because at some places you are expected to attend.   **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

6.15   The acceptability of homophobia?

One test applied by respondents of the culture of organisations was the extent to which homophobic attitudes were seen to be accepted. For some respondents reactions to posters in the workplace provided evidence that homophobia was tolerated and that employer approaches lacked conviction.

The poster doesn't mean anything. And I don't personally feel that homophobia is challenged. If a remark is made it's ignored. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

Sponsorship is not words, sponsorship is actions as well as words and money is required, money and financing. Anyone can say that they believe in a particular thing but it takes a different person to try to pledge that with conviction. And I believe that [the company] at the moment is just doing the word bit. It hasn't really pledged it with conviction. For example, whenever there has been a GLBT event or there's been publicity and posters have gone up in [company] locations, I didn't realise until someone told me, because I don't go into [company] locations that much, that people have ripped them down. Now nothing has been done about that. If the organisation truly

> believed in it, it would do something about it. It would say that that wasn't acceptable to the people. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

For others, this provided a spur to become active in the LGBT network group and/or union to challenge what seemed to be organisational 'acceptance' or 'complacency' of this kind of behaviour.

> I really want to say that on a corporate level the gay issue is like being Black in the Seventies, we are at that stage. It's not cool to be racist at work. It's not acceptable. It's not accepted. You won't hear anyone doing it, anyone. You will hear people saying, you know, 'bloody gay idiot or 'gay boy'…That is totally accepted. So that's why the gay committee, we are extremely active, are extremely vocal for our size. That's because we probably feel that we are so far behind in terms of culturally what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. **(Lesbian, Private Sector, London)**

Key points

- A range of factors was perceived by LGB respondents to influence organisational and workplace culture. These included: the sector of the organisation; the national origin of the organisation e.g. British or American; the geographical location of the organisation or workplace within the UK; the presence of role models in senior positions; gender and in particular male attitudes and religious attitudes of colleagues.
- A common view was that regardless of other organisational factors the attitude of individual employees could have a significant impact on workplace cultures;
- There were variations in the extent to which respondents felt comfortable or uncomfortable within organisations and to which they perceived that colleagues were comfortable with references to sexuality. These variations existed both within and between organisations.
- A key issue which arose when respondents were asked about culture and attitudes within organisations was that of the visibility and invisibility of diversity in relation to sexuality.
- The use of discriminatory or aggressive language and the extent to which it was challenged was perceived to be an important indictor of organisational and workplace culture.
- There was extensive evidence of variations in culture within organisations for example across departments and workplaces and amongst different occupational groups.
- Amongst some local authority respondents there was a perception of a hierarchy of discrimination in which sexuality was de-prioritised.
- Within both the public and private sectors respondents perceived that resistance to change played a role in shaping organisational culture, which had a detrimental impact diversity and inclusion.
- Though cultural changes were acknowledged there was some evidence that heterosexual norms prevailed in both every day workplace interactions and organisational events such as Christmas socials.
- A key indicator in relation to diversity and inclusion for LGB employees was perceived to be the extent to which homophobia was accepted and/or challenged within the workplace.

Chapter 7: Discrimination and harassment against lesbian, gay and bisexual workers

Previous survey research has demonstrated that LGB people experience often harrowing levels of discrimination and harassment at work.[27]

The majority of the respondents within our 'good practice' case study organisations (60.1%) said they had not experienced discrimination at work on grounds of their sexual orientation during the last four years. However just under one in five (18%) of the respondents said that they had experienced discrimination and just under one in four (22.1%) said they did not know whether they had experienced discrimination as it was 'difficult to prove' during the same period. Figure 7.1 shows the profile of respondents by sector. The percentage of respondents who reported discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is lower in this research study than in other recent studies. [28]

Respondents were also asked if they had experienced harassment at work on grounds of their sexual orientation in the last four years. Although the majority said that they had not (70.8%), just under a quarter (22.7%) said they had experienced harassment with 6.5% responding that they did not know whether they had or not. Figure 7.2 shows the profile of respondents by sector. Again the percentage of respondents who reported harassment on grounds of sexual orientation was lower than in other studies. [29]

7.1   Forms of discrimination/harassment

Those who said they had been subject to discrimination and harassment at work described a variety of experiences ranging from discomfort and signs of embarrassment on the part of managers and colleagues, exclusion by colleagues through to homophobic comments and insults. At its most extreme, harassment had been experienced in the form of physical intimidation.

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[27] Palmer, A. (1993) *Less Equal than Others: A Survey of Lesbians and Gay Men at* Work, Sonewall, London; TUC (2000) *Straight Up! Why the Law Should Protect Lesbian and Gay Workers,* London; UNISON (2003) *Unpublished Survey of UNISON LGBT Members*, London; ID Research (2002) *Employers and Employment Report*, London.

[28] For example, the TUC survey (op cit. 2000) found that 44% of people surveyed had suffered discriminatory treatment at work, a UNISON survey (op cit. 2003) of its members reported that over 52% said that they had been discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. The ID Research survey (op cit 2002) identified the workplace as the most common site of discrimination against LGB people and found that 28% of its respondents reported discrimination on grounds of sexuality

[29] For example Palmer's, Stonewall survey (1993) found that 48% of respondents considered they had been harassed because of their sexuality.
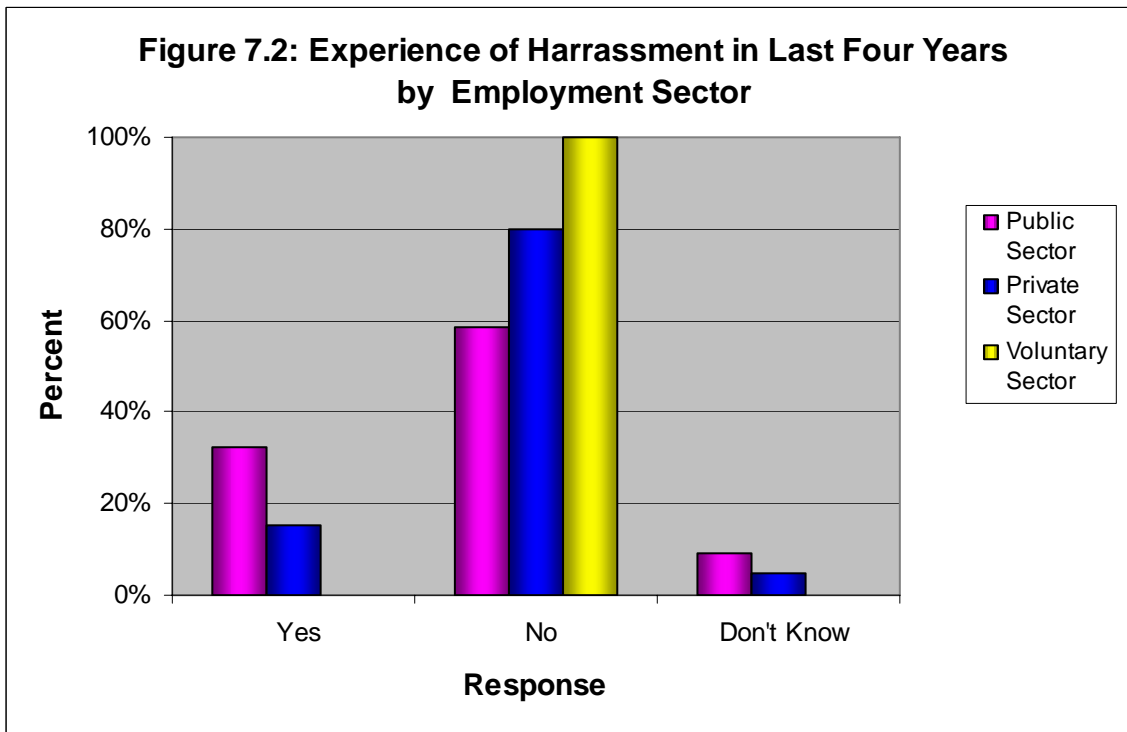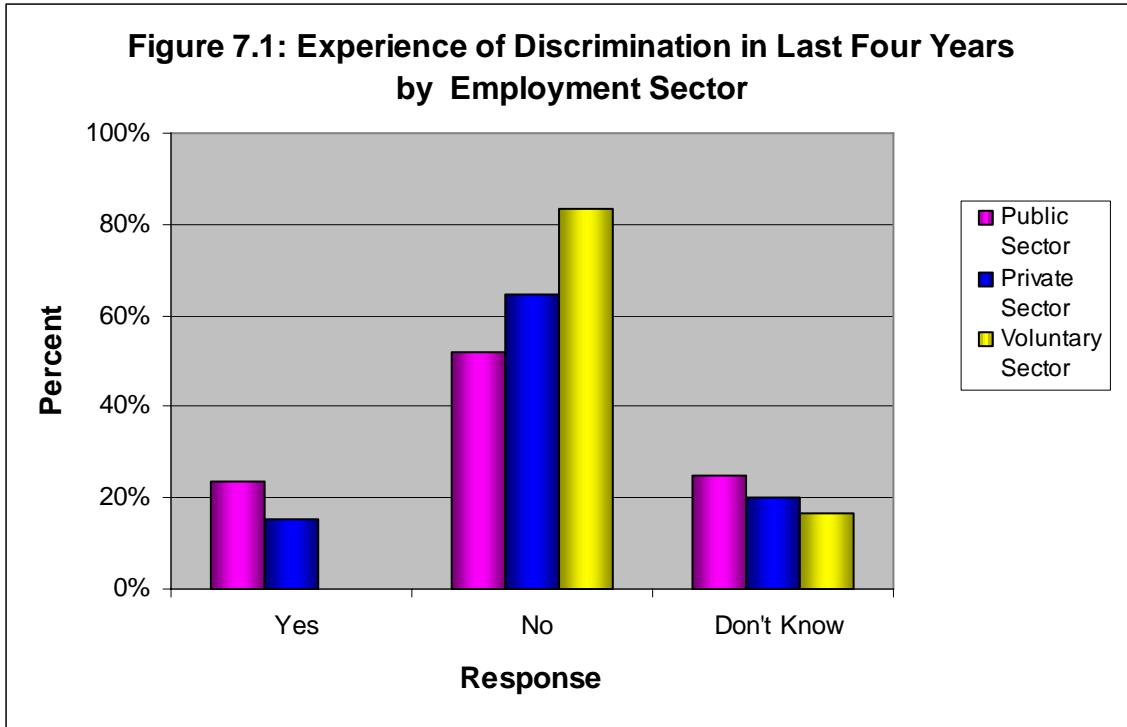
Figure 7.1: Experience of Discrimination in Last Four Years by Employment Sector

Figure 7.2: Experience of Harrassment in Last Four Years by Employment Sector

Table 7.1: Forms of discrimination and harassment
• Nervousness/embarrassment • Exclusion/silence • Homophobic comments – direct and indirect • Insults • Physical & emotional intimidation

7.1.1 Nervousness/embarrassment

The experience of a gay man in a local authority provides an example of a nervous reaction on the part of a manager, which was evidently different to the experience of straight colleagues. In common with other reported experiences of discrimination and harassment it was difficult to prove, but left the respondent in little doubt as to its origins.

> There was a manager…who I just thought he was pretty nervous most of the time. Because all of my colleagues when they had supervision with him, it took about two hours. When I had supervision it took about twenty minutes. And…he was sweating and whatever. And I didn't think anything of it until he came to my department one time and, one of my colleagues there said 'My God, he is really nervous around you' and I said 'Is he? I thought he was always like that?' and he said 'No, he is, I have never seen him like that' and he was like dropping things and like stepping away if I moved around and things like that. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

7.1.2 Exclusion/silence

A gay man's experience of exclusion in another organisation provides further illustration of the difficulties of proving discrimination, because those he believed to be responsible had been careful not to express what he suspected were their real feelings.

> They will adopt strategies or tactics for perhaps marginalising you or ignoring you or whatever, I don't know, so therefore it becomes very difficult, you know, if somebody said to me, have you ever been a victim of homophobia whilst you worked for the [organisation] I would probably say yes, I think I have on two occasions, both with sort of senior officers but I couldn't prove that. Because there is no way they are going to say what they really feel. Because the context and the organisation I work for wouldn't allow it, it's just not acceptable. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

Thus, respondents having seen the treatment meted out to other gay colleagues feared 'exclusion,'

> Losing the comradeship around me. Yeah, that's my biggest fear. Because I have worked with them for 15 years plus and it's a case of…I have been there for all this time, we get on, we have a laugh, we socialise together occasionally sometimes. If they were to know maybe, the fear is that they completely abandon me. **(BME Gay man, Private sector, London).**

7.1.3 Homophobic comments

A common theme to emerge was that LGB workers experienced discrimination in the form of 'inappropriate' comments, which were in essence homophobic. Such comments were sometimes direct, but at other times indirect in that they were articulated in the presence of LGB workers, for example by people outside the workforce who were unaware of the sexuality of those in their midst.

> I was in the process of being handed over the responsibility for some services from a female colleague of mine, she was there and she obviously knew about my sexuality. And the client we were with in the middle of lunch cracked a very unfortunate homosexual joke, very, very, very inappropriate, really, really inappropriate and part of me was wanting to like go in there and like say something and defend myself. And then the other part of me thought 'Well, maybe he doesn't know about me' and stuff like that. So I kept quiet. And part of me was a bit upset with myself that I had kept quiet at the time and the other part of me was thinking, "Well, he probably didn't know any different and maybe over time we can develop that". **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

The experience of one gay man in a local authority illustrates a common concern that homophobic comments were effectively tolerated in a way that other discriminatory comments would not be.

> [I've] learned to equate what they say as being rude because it's all jolly to your face and so on, it's, it's the vagaries of it which make it so difficult. Comments from a boss next door, you know, walking into my office, he made some various comments which were inappropriate. Which I spoke to my boss about. And said 'I really don't feel that's appropriate' and his answer was 'I see what you mean but it's not really that important, is it?'. I can't think exactly what it was. But all I will say is that if you'd swap the word 'gay' for 'Black', then there would have been an extremely big issue. **(Gay man, Public Sector, London**)

7.1.4 Insults, physical and emotional intimidation

Harassment however was generally experienced as more overt and direct, though there were examples of respondents who felt that they had been harassed but found it difficult to prove that the motivation of the harasser was homophobic.

> Yeah, I think it was, I don't think they were possibly particularly being, …vicious or vindictive, I think they were being more flippant and, you know, this sort of macho type of nonsense you get. But nevertheless what it told me was that they had a certain attitude towards gay people. And then of course later when I didn't get the job and I thought I was treated in a very rough and ready way, now the thing was I could have just accepted it and cowered under but I was just not going to do that. **(Gay man, Private sector, London**)

> And that does upset me. And it does make me think I don't really want to be here and getting bullied, and maybe I am being discriminated against, I don't know, I can't prove it which is a problem. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Harassment could make work a miserable and threatening place to be.

> Just coming in here it undermines me before I even sit down to do my job. Quite often, I feel like I have to put on a suit of armour just to get here. And it sounds dramatic but it's true. It does take energy out of me just getting here, being here, making myself sort of mentally braced for the day. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

> There were about 250 men working on that production line. And you have an area where you work, you know, you have so many, like ten paces that's your area. Sometimes you have to overlap into someone else's area. Well, if I ever went into that other person's area by a few steps they would stop work because they knew I was gay because somebody had told them. When the supervisor asked him why he stopped work, he'd say 'Well, I am not working with him because he is bent, I am not working with him or go anywhere near him'. And you got that kind of, that attitude from it. And also you'd get things, when I was working on the production line I had things thrown at me…anything that they could get their hands on really…and when you look round…you don't know who it was, you know. **(Gay man, Private sector, London**)

> About three years ago, I had about a couple of years of anonymous stuff going on…..there were lots of different things going on….it was all very personal and no-one knew who it was but that all came to a head

and I was actually willing to jack the job in, and say I've had enough, because that's how I felt, and your self esteem just hits rock bottom.' **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

7.2   Moving on and moving around

Discrimination and harassment on grounds of sexual orientation had also played a part in the decisions taken by respondents to leave organisations or to stay within certain parts of organisations, as illustrated in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Reasons for leaving organisations
• Homophobic or unsafe environment • Experience of harassment • Inability to come out

For example, experiences of harassment and homophobia had played a key part in the decisions taken by two lesbians working in local government to leave their previous authorities.

> I think one of the reasons why I left [that authority] was because of the extremity of the homophobia and I wasn't out there because it was totally unsafe to be out there and I was terribly young. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

> Yeah, but one of the reasons I went on to do my diploma was I needed to leave my post at [that authority] because of quite a lot of issues around sexuality. I felt quite harassed by a manager. So that kind of kicked me into leaving. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

Another woman working in banking had changed employers because she felt the culture of her previous bank had led her to believe that career advancement would be difficult as a lesbian. And for a gay man working in local government, the fact that he felt unable to come out had influenced his decision to leave.

> I did have a lot of good times there, and there were a lot of nice people but, that was living a lie and it just wasn't the sort of place to come out and admit that you are gay. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Another related experience illustrated by the account of a gay man in the private sector was that variations in culture within the organisation had influenced choices about where to work:

> I am aware that what I don't want to do is to move into an area where I will encounter discrimination. So for example, I wouldn't move into an

engineering division. Because that's a much more macho type of environment whereas if you look at areas of business development, marketing, IT, those areas generally are populated by better educated people who are generally more open and more modern in their outlook. So it has had an impact. **(Gay man, private sector, London)**

7.3   Career progression

Discrimination and harassment were interpreted and experienced differently by respondents, and a widespread perception was that it was not necessarily possible to know whether discrimination had occurred for example in relation to career progression and promotion. For some there was an underlying feeling that it may have played a part in determining job progression.

I don't think it's happened but the problem is that because of some of these people who I have referred to in the past you never know....you know, that they've heard from someone else that I am gay and as a result of that some of their actions, that's why I have always had to be careful with who I tell and who I haven't. Because potentially if I was to go through my career always thinking well, I haven't got my promotion because I am gay that can be very very destructive. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

I have occasionally wondered whether or not sort of simply by not being part of the kind of standard couples networks and not having kids and things like that whether or not in a kind of passive sense by not having an in on several sort of established mainstream types of communication and interaction and things like that, whether I miss out on in some kind of invisible way on some of the networking opportunities that some people have and whether that might be to my detriment. I don't know about that. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire**)

I am still on a trainee grade. Which after seven years I think what's the reason behind that, whereas….of those twelve that started on the same day, they are all a lot higher up than me now. In terms of promotion, pay rates and the lot. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire**)

7.4   Personal strategies to deal with discrimination, harassment and negative attitudes

Table 7.3 summarises the different sorts of strategies adopted by lesbian, gay and bisexual workers to respond to and cope with discrimination and harassment.

Table 7.3: Strategies for dealing with discrimination, harassment and negative attitudes
- Avoidance   - Ignoring remarks   - Using humour   - Hiding emotion   - Taking control   - Educating people   - Challenging prejudice head on

One strategy was simply to avoid perpetrators or to 'move around' the source or site of the harassment.

> God, I was completely miserable. And I avoided doing certain things, I lost a lot of confidence. and I started deliberately doing things to avoid having to go in to see him. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

A second approach was to ignore such remarks. However, whilst for some this was a constant strategy for others it was a decision made depending on the particular circumstances and person involved.

> Most of this like just washed all over me just ignoring them and just getting on with my work basically. So blank it all out. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

> Well, it depends who at the clients has said it. You have to manage it differently every time and sometimes I don't even manage it at all, I just ignore it. It depends on the situation and who said it really. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London**)

Respondents provided varied accounts of the extent to which they chose to challenge homophobic comments or language. One approach was not to challenge directly, but to hope that people would change their behaviour through personal knowledge and interaction.

> No, people take me at face value so if they don't like me outside of work then that's their issue not mine. So take it or leave it, I am quite happy to speak to anybody outside of work. I don't have any real issues even if people are homophobic…I've had dealings with them in the past. It's a case of, I don't shove anything down their face, I don't try and talk them into being un-homophobic….I don't try and change their point of view. I just hope that they will get to know me as a person and change their views accordingly. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Other respondents provided examples of challenging discriminatory remarks more directly in order to 'nip it in the bud'.

> I kind of like stand my ground, I am my own man I hope and once or twice it actually really happened. I was like walking to have a wee as you do and a couple of them actually stood with their back against the wall like that. I said 'Come on, lads, what are you playing at, what's your game?' and …..because I challenged them they actually just went red. 'I am sorry, mate, it's just a reaction, I am sorry, that won't happen again' and just like 'No, fair enough' and then just walk on and just and it never did. And they (have) sort of been okay after that and we just had a decent friendship after that. Just nip it in the bud, I guess. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

> Well, he absolutely avoided me. Until one day he got into a position where he was standing in a corridor coming towards his office, I was going in the corridor in the other direction, and there was no way he could not talk to me. I said to him 'What's your problem, I am the same guy that's been working with you for the last three years, I am no different today than I was yesterday except you now know that I sleep with other men. I don't fancy   you, what's your problem?' And I got a smile. And after that, absolutely fine, no problem at all. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

> And when I kind of joined their team it was all male and I can remember at the end of the meeting they would say to me 'Oh, you can go now because we are going to talk about women and cars'. So I kind of got ousted at the end of the meeting for them to talk about these things. And then one time a colleague said, his wife had just had a baby and he said 'Oh, I got pictures of my child, would you all like to see them' at which I went forward and was told 'No, because you are gay you don't particularly want to see them, you can go'…. I got one back because you see the next meeting after that I said 'Would anybody like to see pictures of my children?' which blew their mind because nobody knew I had children because I had been a donor and my children were about four and five at the time. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

However, one lesbian expressed concern that challenging such remarks was something she had to do repeatedly.

> One of the things I don't like about this job is having to always be the one challenging things, either language, attitudes, and it's something now I have zero-tolerance with. I tell the people I work with, 'Look, if you do or say something inappropriate I'll probably say something and obviously if I say something I want you to tell me too.' It's not that I'm

> saying I'm perfect. I'm just tired of bottling up emotions just because I didn't nip it in the bud. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

A different strategy was to use humour to defuse the situation or to 'play along' with inappropriate comments. Some respondents accepted that they would have to put up with 'banter'.

> Anyway I walked into the office and somebody said 'Look at the chaos they are causing in that prison. I hate lesbians' …..and I said 'Oh, which lesbian upset you this morning then?' and then she realised what she'd said and she said 'I really didn't mean it'. Well, why say it? Anyway I made a bit of a joke out of it. And cooled it that way. And the person concerned actually said 'I am really really sorry', gave me a hug, and said 'I shouldn't have said that'. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

> Because I am quite extrovert in many ways. Quite funny. And I am a bit of a party animal. I am quite happy going to get pissed with the lads. But I do it in my own way. And people like me because they just think 'Oh, he's a decent bloke'. You know, quite a lot of the time you go through this process where they are trying to get comfortable, so there will be a few innocuous jokes about 'You know, there's a rugby player and you'll like that'. They don't mean it nastily and it's their way of testing what the water is. **(Gay man, Private sector, London**)

> I have always thought, if you come into this job, you've got to be able to cope with a bit of banter and mickey taking and I just try and give it straight back really. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, London)**

The experience of one gay man illustrates the use of challenging discrimination to seek to educate colleagues.

> I am quite vocal about equal opportunities, not just about gay people, generally about equality and diversity. And I make a point of challenging discrimination. I try to do it within a sort of humanist political context, so it's not about just telling people not to do it, it's about explaining why not to do it. So the people I deal with very quickly know what I am about. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Another gay man explained how he drew parallels with racial discrimination when homophobic remarks were made in order to make people think again.

> I must admit that nowadays I usually respond immediately with usually a racist equivalent comment. Just to put what the person said in context….. Just to make the person think about what they are saying. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

However, the experiences of two lesbians, both of whom had experienced discrimination in the workplace, illustrate the use of the journey to and from work to hide their emotions and feelings.

> I am lucky because it takes me forty-five minutes to get to work so …. during that process of driving here, I sort of shed my own persona, I leave it in Leeds or leave it in the car on the road, I literally come in here and I try and focus on my work. I don't come to work expecting to be friends or be friendly. I don't socialise with the people I work with. I mean, I go out for the Christmas meal and it's horrible. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

> I never used to cry at work. ….And I always used to say to myself I am not going to cry in front of him, no matter what he does to me…. and he'd shout in my face or scream at me across the office and so everybody would hear. So I used to cry all the way home from work, like a baby. And then I stopped when I got home. Because when I got home and the front door was shut there wasn't any need to be upset anymore. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

A different approach was to pre-empt discrimination by taking control of the situation either at the outset of employment or on a day to day basis.

> Right, maybe, because they just know they can't with me, they just know that I wouldn't tolerate it for a moment. I am very clear. That's why at the interview I kind of said exactly who I am and if they had an issue with it I wanted to know there and then really. Because I wouldn't have come to the borough. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

> I just brought all the pieces of work that I had to do to him and made sure that they were kind of like as far as possible perfect. So that he couldn't criticise them. He found maybe one or two minor things or whatever. The pressure was to be better than straight people to prove that I was as good as (them). **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

7.5   Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' sources of support

Table 7.4 shows the different sources of support which respondents explained they had used or would use if they experienced discrimination or harassment. These were not mutually exclusive however in that it was common for respondents to describe scenarios involving more than one actual or possible source of support.

Table 7.4 : Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' potential and actual sources of support
- Line managers   - HR/Equalities/Employee Counselling   - Colleagues   - LGB groups/networks   - Trade unions   - Friends/Partners

7.5.1 Line managers

The most common source of potential support cited by respondents was the line manager often because that person was considered to be the 'appropriate' person to go to in the first instance. A lesbian who had experienced discrimination from a colleague described how she had felt supported when taking this route.

> I spoke to my line manager about it and it was dealt with very quickly and the person was asked to go on some training and asked to go back to their line manager and discuss what they'd like on the training. So I'd felt supported in that as well. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

Other respondents explained that they would approach their line manager if discrimination occurred but that they would seek additional advice and support from other sources. For example this gay man explained that though he would go to his line manager in the first instance, he might use other avenues both internally and externally.

> I'd go to my line manager. She would be very supportive for things like that. I do trust her quite a lot about stuff like that. But then I don't know where she'd take it. But I've also got [the LGBT group] if I needed to and also the union. But I also have my friends here as well. I would have gone to the Deputy Chief Officer. And I suppose then I'd go to the union and I suppose I would have gone to Citizens Advice to find out about organisations that would support me and people in awful predicaments at work. I've never checked it out but presumably there are independent organisations that would give support in those situations. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

One respondent explained that as well as speaking to her manager she would also approach her union

> I would speak to my manager and speak to my union as well. I'd use those two. And I do feel quite confident that I'd be able to approach my manager because obviously working in the service we do get regular supervision so there is plenty of time to discuss things like that with your manager and she is quite approachable. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Whether people would feel able to go to their managers however depended on that person's attitudes as illustrated by this respondent.

> [Having a supportive manager] is a bit like having a backstop isn't it. It's moderately important. I have never had one that I was particularly uncomfortable with…. But I know that other people who haven't got such a supportive manager…feel differently. Because he's there and he's okay I don't have any strong feelings about him, one way or another. If I [felt] awkward about it or about his attitude to me, I would feel differently about him as a person and wouldn't take any problems to him. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

7.5.2 Human Resources/Equalities/Employee Counselling

Line managers were often seen as the first port of call but respondents accepted that they may have to pursue a grievance further including going to human resources.

> I suppose I would go, probably depending on who it was, either to my line manager or the HR or the head of the department. …. Whether they would say 'Well, no, you need to go to see X' but if I was experiencing problems with a certain member of staff, I'd go to my line manager and find out what the procedure is. I wouldn't really know what to do after that. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

However, where line managers were seen as part of the problem or respondents were not out to their line managers then HR, Equalities and Diversity or an Employee counselling service was seen as the sensible alternative.

For one lesbian, though, the approach of the equalities department did not seem to take account of the individual making a complaint.

> It does tend to be the case that equalities can be a bit removed, they think they are doing the right thing, but they don't seem to really talk to the people, really talk to them and find out what they are thinking and maybe just try and persuade them to do it, they just seem to assume, 'well we know it works, we'll do it this way'. **(Lesbian, public sector, London)**

7.5.3 Colleagues

Respondents also recounted situations where they had sought support from colleagues.

> Basically one of my work colleagues, he knew I was gay, he understood basically my feelings about it. He won't take people's sides basically. He won't take their side and at the same time he could be objective as to what I was saying, whether I was being a bit over the top. I probably could have spoken to somebody from the LGBT group but of course if I had gone through that route it would have become probably a   bit more official and so there would be implications for relationships with particular people so I didn't really pursue that. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

> I would probably go to another GBLT person or somebody else I knew in [the company] to say 'Look, I've got an issue here, blablabla' and I would discuss it first. But I would need to think about what to do about it. If it's too bad, I'd talk to my manager but it's broaching the subject of being gay. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

7.5.4 LGB groups/networks

LGB(T) groups and networks were seen as important potential sources of support either in addition to or instead of other avenues, for example because other possible avenues were seen as problematic. The groups were important organisational contacts for those who were not out at work or those who needed to talk through the problems they were experiences and find out more about organisational policies and procedures.

> We've got a group in the section which is about, there is a group of us that meet on a regular basis just to talk about what's going on for us and we do talk about the stresses that we are putting up with. So I'd go to them. I wouldn't go to my managers. I wouldn't go to my colleagues. My fellow gay colleague….won't talk about sexuality issues whatsoever at work. I occasionally talk to him but he's very quiet and very like 'Let's not make an issue out of it.' So I will go to these guys instead. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, Yorkshire)**

> First of all I'd talk to my manager about it. She is quite often based here anyway when she is out and about. So I'd talk to her about it and I'd also go through the group…and see if they'd had any advice really. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

7.5.6 Trade unions

As indicated above, the trade union was often seen as part of a dual route in combination with the line manager or the LGBT group, but in one case the absence of a rep made this problematic:

> I am in the union….. but actually there is no union rep in here. So really if I had to go to a union rep I wouldn't have anybody here that I could sort of go to sort of speak to, to find out, I mean, I still could phone X up and find out. But I would think that [my manager] would help me. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**.

> If anything really, really did go seriously wrong now then I know that I would have support from the union…You see when I was a manager I was in another union and they are not as strong. They have not got a very big group at all and they don't sing about gay people. You see, the CWU sings about everybody…But I know that if I had any problems I could go to them in confidence and things would be sorted out. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

In some cases, LGB respondents were confident that they would receive help through their branch. However, where this was not the case and the union had a regional or national LGBT group that was the preferred avenue to seek advice.

> The [union] group has got a confidential helpline where you can speak to trained counsellors. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

> I think when I first arrived there was a strong union profile. ..... I am not sure they have recovered from the merging of the different unions here. And as far as I know certainly over the last half a dozen years and it might just be because I don't know but I am not aware of there being a lesbian and gay trade union group in this borough. So that's why I say that for people who do feel isolated, different, discriminated against, harassed or bullied, even through the union routes, it's not clear, everybody has to go for somewhere else. You know go to central union office, go outside for support. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

7.5.7 Friends/partners

This lesbian respondent explained that she relied on her partner for support in the first instance, but that she also looked to friends within the workforce. As a manager she had also received support from her own staff who were aware of the treatment she was experiencing.

My partner. My friend because I knew [a lesbian colleague] at that time and there were one or two others. I also had a team of seven people who supported me. I was supposed to be supporting them as their manager but they were supporting me emotionally because they knew what was happening. He'd got this obsession with public humiliation, that was his speciality.**(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

7.6   Dealing with discrimination and harassment

When discussing how they would like incidents of harassment and discrimination dealt with, a common view amongst respondents was the need for confidentiality. Some respondents went further and suggested that there was also a need for anonymous reporting mechanisms where the someone felt unable to go to their line manager.

It will be nice to see some sort of anonymous mechanism to report these kinds of incidents. That way managers could be aware it was happening but at the same time the anonymity would protect the person who was experiencing it. I think something like that would be of great use. That kind of gets you over the issue of going to your line manager. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

Others spoke of the need for someone 'safe' to talk things through with perhaps before going to the line manager and one respondent spoke of the value of a 'visible' welfare officer within the workplace.

I think having a contact that is going to be a safe person for you to talk to, to work out how you want to follow things up, is probably the best thing. I know that the one time that I have been most upset and have spoken to my line manager, I could have done with somebody at that point to speak to and say 'Look, am I being silly, is this real, is this really something to be upset about or have I just got out of bed on the wrong side this morning and it's wound me up'. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

A welfare officer is worth their weight in gold. And a visible welfare officer but we don't appear to have one. I would see that as a multi-disciplinary role, I wouldn't say it's specifically anything to do with sexuality and I don't think we need one who was specifically geared up to that, same as I wouldn't see one necessarily, for [other groups]. But a well-rounded, well-experienced either individual or department. And I think their role should be certainly on the listening angle for a whole raft of reasons, not necessarily to do with sexuality. A visible supportive…..role, we are here if you need us. Something that I am surprised isn't here. They may have one in the council, I don't know. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Another concern expressed by respondents in relation to the way discrimination and harassment was dealt with was the fact that in order to pursue a complaint workers risked exposing themselves.

> Yeah, well I think generally speaking the person who wants to make a complaint because they have been harassed is not in a comfortable position…. It should be the easiest position to be in but you've got a lot to prove and quite often you have to stick your neck out quite a long way to make a complaint. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

One respondent described how her manager to take a formal approach by making an official complaint had placed her under pressure, even though she favoured a more informal approach.

> Well, while all this was going on with, just recently with this incident, spate of what I call harassment and I rang [the counselling line] to seek advice which was the sort of bullying line and they basically said I had to make a formal complaint for them to investigate it. But I would have exposed myself, I would have been up there as being a trouble causer and I don't know of any other way of actually doing this but it meant that I would have had to have had so much serious evidence against this person….and people back down. People don't support you, you know. I could be naive and think that people will support you but I don't know, it just felt as though I was basically left, you make that decision and my manager was basically like 'Well, I can't investigate until you do something about it', it's like 'Well, thanks for the support here'. I didn't want to go to that extremity either. He wouldn't do anything about it. I wanted a mediation meeting. He wouldn't do it. He wanted me to make an official complaint. I didn't want that. Because it would have made me to be a real ass, I would have wanted a mediation meeting with this woman with a mediator. Not with him there. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Further concerns about formal procedures were that even if they were very tight, a complainant would not necessarily be guaranteed confidentiality in practice and that pursuing a complaint might be dealt with supportively but wouldn't change the attitudes in the workforce.

> There is a very strict procedure called bullying and harassment and basically the idea is you go to your immediate manager…..or go to the manager above him or keep on going until you've got one that isn't harassing you. And then you start there and then they assess it looking down to whoever is harassing you. And it's a very strict procedure. but things do get out in the papers. Quite easily, and if you were going to take action like that, and everybody knew what he was like but nobody dares do anything about it, nobody dares say anything to him, so

> although it was me that he was harassing, everybody else could see the harassment but they didn't feel able to do anything about it. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

> There are procedures you can go through, I mean, (the company) are quite good and they will support you. But that doesn't actually affect you as much on the ground. They are alright in terms of management speak, but you can't stop people saying unpleasant things. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

Further concerns were expressed about the 'backlash' that might occur where an LGB respondent did in fact make a complaint or raise a grievance.

> The problem is that they want to have examples of homophobia. They actively are requesting for people to blow the whistle on others... Because they want to change the culture…They want to be able to show in a very visible way that they support gay issues without having to send an email around saying that they support gay issues. They have absolutely no tolerance for it. But the problem is there is no one who will blow the whistle… For example, I know plenty, as I said there is one guy who is actually diabolical but I have had plenty of opportunities to report him. Plenty. But I won't do it because I come from a mindset which is I will get by in this industry, whatever the industry will throw at me and I will deal with them on an individual basis. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

> You've got all the legal backing and I think the union would back you but I just know what it's like when you cause trouble. And you alienate yourself even more.   There is a member of staff at another hostel…who challenged some homophobia…all the staff stopped speaking to him and he was persecuted. The guy was off sick for six months. You know, and then he was basically bullied, bullied and bullied. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

For another lesbian respondent, who still saw management systems within the organisation as 'very opaque,' there were other concerns,

> Imagine I have a dispute, someone is really homophobic…Okay, it depends on who that person is….just imagine he's in my line of managers. Okay ultimately, maybe what happens in this case I got a positive ruling…But if I continue to stay in that environment, what will happen…they have all the power in the world to make my life extremely difficult. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

Key points

- The majority of the respondents within the sample (60.1%) said they had not experienced discrimination at work on grounds of their sexual orientation during the last four years.   However just under one in five (18%) of the respondents said that they had experienced discrimination and just under one in four (22.1%) said they did not know whether they had experienced discrimination.
- The majority of respondents within the sample said that they had not experienced harassment (70.8%), 22.7% said they had experienced harassment with 6.5% responding that they did not know whether they had or not.
- Respondents who said they had been subject to discrimination and harassment at work described a variety of experiences ranging from discomfort and signs of embarrassment on the part of managers and colleagues, exclusion by colleagues through to homophobic comments and insults. At its most extreme, harassment had been experienced in the form of physical intimidation.
- Discrimination and harassment was reported to have played apart in the decisions taken by respondents to leave organisations or to stay within certain parts of organisations. Reasons for leaving organisations included perceptions of a homophobic or unsafe environment; experience of harassment and an inability to come out.
- Respondents described a range of strategies for coping and dealing with discrimination, harassment and discriminatory attitudes. Non- challenging responses included: avoidance; ignoring remarks; using humour; hiding emotion. Alternative challenging strategies included: taking control of situations; seeking to educate people and challenging prejudice head on.
- The most common source of potential support described by respondents in relation to discrimination and harassment was the line manager. Other potential and actual sources of support referred to were: human resources; equalities officers/units; employee counselling services; colleagues; LGB groups and networks; trade unions and friends/partners.
- Trade unions were commonly seen as part of a dual route in combination with line managers or LGB groups.
- Confidentiality and in some cases anonymity were perceived by respondents as necessary when taking up complaints of harassment and discrimination.
- Respondents expressed concern that they risked exposing themselves or generating a backlash when seeking a resolution to discrimination or harassment and that even supportive handling of a complaint would not guarantee a change in individual attitudes within the workplace.

Chapter 8:   Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' perceptions of organisational policy and practice

Having considered the LGB respondent's perceptions of organisational and workplace culture and some of the problems which still face LGB employees, this chapter moves on to examine the impact of organisational policy and practice from the point of view of the LGB respondents.

Figure 8.1 provides a profile of LGB respondents in relation to their perception of the extent to which their employers were gay friendly in terms of policy and practice. A majority (81.1%) strongly agreed/agreed that their employer was gay friendly in policy and nearly two thirds (62.7%) strongly agreed/agreed that their employer was gay friendly in practice. In general, therefore the case study employers were seen as gay friendly in policy and practice by the majority of LGB respondents.

However there was some evidence of a perceived 'implementation gap' amongst respondents in our sample. For example, although one in three (34%) strongly agreed that their employer was gay friendly in policy, just under one in five (18.3%) strongly agreed that this was the case in practice. Also just over a quarter of the respondents (28.1%), neither agreed nor disagreed that their employer was gay friendly in practice with 9.1% disagreeing that this was the case.

There was some variation by sector. Over three quarters of public sector LGB respondents (77.6%) agreed their employer was 'gay friendly' in terms of its employment policies with 63.1% agreeing that this was the case in practice. Amongst private sector LGB respondents, 83.1% agreed their employer was 'gay friendly' in terms of its employment policies whereas 60% agreed that this was the case in practice. Nearly all of the voluntary sector employees (91.6%) agreed their employer was 'gay friendly' in terms of its employment policies with 75% agreeing that this was the case in practice.

Figure 8.1: I consider my employer to be a 'gay friendly' employer
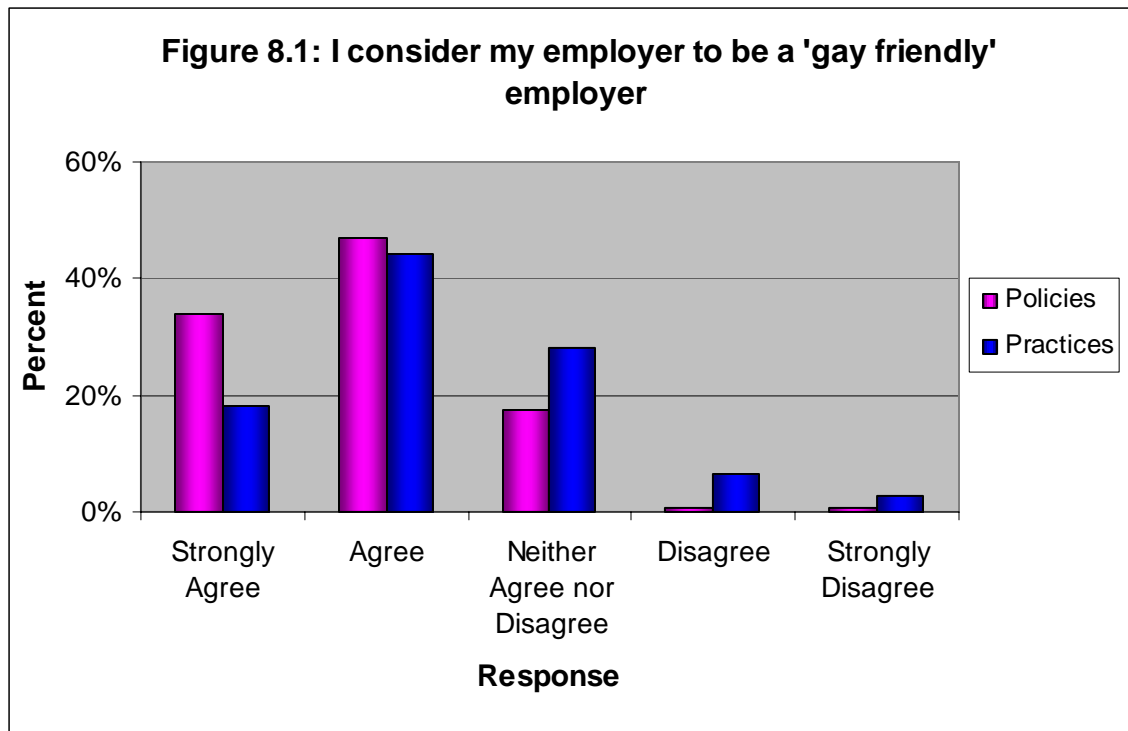
Working for an organisation that was gay friendly in both policy and practice was important to the LGB respondents as exemplified by the experiences of this gay man.

> It's increased job satisfaction and as well if I hear of anything in the workplace I am more likely to sort of mention things to other people as well. So it sort of gets the message broadcast at the employee level that these aren't just ideas, they are actually put into practice and they are working. You know, it makes you feel as though [the company] has a set of values and it actually drives them forward as well and it acts on them. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

Other respondents were more circumspect about practice but described the importance of the employer having policies in place.

> I suppose it's because I have never been involved in any homophobic incidents so I couldn't say how [the organisation] would react in practice to the policy. I feel that the policy is in place and it's quite a strong, it's a pretty robust policy and it spells out to the letter what is expected of staff but as I haven't been subjected to any discrimination within the council I don't know how any grievance would be taken forward and how it would be dealt with. Or whether they would act on it at all though I feel that they would. So it's kind of just in practice and in theory kind of response I suppose to ticking those boxes. I suppose everybody working to the same policy is what makes it work, you

know….It's just like I said earlier, just feels like a safety net to me. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire**)

However, even amongst those who were positive about policy and practice, there was a view that implementation was in part always going to be dependent on individual personalities and attitudes and that the existence of a gap between policy and practice was inevitable.

> It still comes down to individual actions and so on. I mean, as I say, I have not really experienced any difficulties myself. I've got a friend who works for [a competitor] who again have exactly, you know, similar policies to [this organisation] but she's…relayed stories where gay customers have come in for a mortgage application or something like that and there's been, they've been treated differently or there has been a reaction from her colleagues. So I do, I think there is always going to be a difference between policy and practice. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

Others were cautious about the pace of implementation such as this lesbian, who commented on the gradual impact of training on policy implementation over time and the challenge of getting managers on board.

> I think [policies] have a level of impact because they filter through training… And I think that they do have that. It's very slow. I've seen impact over twenty years and I've seen each one how it's been introduced and how it's filtered through. And it's done very mechanically but very slowly. … And I do hope that the 2003 Regulations will filter through in the same way ….. It's hard to implement, because   you've got to have managers that are on board. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Two further observations can be made about the diversity of views expressed. First, there were also those within the sample who were either ambivalent about whether their employer's policy and practice was gay friendly and those who believed it was not. Second, the responses suggest a concern about the efficacy of policy and perceptions of an implementation gap. This was described by one gay man as a sense that the employer did not always 'walk the talk'.

> It's just a feeling, more than anything. I strongly agree that [the company] are trying to do all they can to encourage diversity and they are making a hell of a lot of right noises and all the rest. Part of me at times does question whether it is just people talking the talk and not walking the walk, is it that type of thing, that they are coming out with all the right phrases and look aren't we good. **(Gay Man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

> Well, in a theoretical way, yes. I'm glad. I am really chuffed [the company did well] in the Stonewall league but at the end of the day I still have to come to work and sit with the same people who've been abusive to me three years ago. You know, those people haven't changed and I don't really think the way they think has changed very much. [The company] likes to sell itself as a champion of diversity but I do think it's more talk than action. It's because they like to be a cool employer, isn't it. That's why I always say, policy doesn't mean anything. It's about how it's implemented. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

Another concern about policy implementation expressed by respondents was that employers could and did fall into the trap of a 'tick box' approach to policy implementation with an emphasis on little more than legal compliance or winning an 'award'. It was suggested that consistent follow through and commitment was needed, including publicising the policy more widely.

> I think it's really important that if you are going to have an equality strategy it's not just a tick box one and it's followed through, not just followed through once but followed through consistently and when that's followed through that's not just tick box as well. … I think in theory they've got all the right policies in place as far as I am aware, being quite new. ….. In practice I'd like to see that publicised even more because I think it's such a good example of good practice that that should be sort of paraded more around the organisation. And I think the [poster campaign] is doing that, but I think it can be done more. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

> Well, I think [the company] needs to decide what it wants and who wants it. And that needs to be driven by senior people. And I think that will define where things go. I get the feeling that a lot of the policies are driven by a preference to avoid being sued. Some of the other policies have been driven by enlightened people in HR …. and senior management but that's it. And you know, as to the rest of the organisation, there are things like compulsory training on diversity. …. Everyone has to do it, no-one wants to do it, you do it, tick the box, gone. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

8.1 Perceived barriers to policy implementation

Respondents discussed a wide range of perceived barriers to policy implementation, which are summarised in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Perceived barriers to policy implementation	
Promotional	• Lack of proactive approach to policy implementation • Need for positive images
Managerial	• Insufficient commitment from senior management • Getting middle management on board
Cultural	• Conflict with religious groups and networks • Negative impact of family friendly policies on LGB employees • Resistance to change
Attitudinal	• Perceptions of secrecy amongst gay colleagues • Individual attitudes prevailing • Perceptions of LGB employees receiving special treatment
Enforcement	• Organisational reliance on whistle blowing • Reluctance of individuals to whistle blow • Unwillingness to remove people
Resources	• Cutting LGB initiatives • Insufficient funding for LGB initiatives • Lack of resources for training
Evidential	• Insufficient data on LGB staff • Need for staff survey
Communication	• Failure to cascade policy down • Lack of grassroots feedback

8.1.1 Promotional barriers

Respondents argued that employers needed to give more 'public' support to LGB equality and be explicit about the unacceptability of discrimination whether direct or indirect. It was suggested that an organisation might have a commitment to LGB equality but not 'articulate' it loudly. There was a perceived need to avoid a 'reactive' approach, which involved 'going through the motions', and to provide 'stronger and visible' support for policies and 'positive images' of LGB people. Concern was expressed that a failure to promote policy sufficiently could leave staff feeling isolated. For example, it was argued that more could be done to promote the existence of groups and networks for LGB employees.

I am still convinced that a large proportion of gay, lesbian and bisexual people in [the company] still don't even know that [the group] exists. I would like to see a much bigger advertising campaign, a bit more publicity. Because I am convinced that there is a lot of people that don't know it's there. I think it's been running for three years and they say 'What's that?' and you think, people should know that that exists. **(Gay man, Private sector, London**)

8.1.2 Managerial barriers

Managerial barriers were said to exist at both senior management level and below. Respondents argued that middle or 'first line' managers had a particularly important role to play in shaping the culture of the workplace and this was seen as a key challenge which still needed to be tackled.

It's very much a case of we have gone a long way from five years ago but what we haven't done is on an every day basis we haven't totally wiped out homophobia. So from a middle management perspective it's to change a culture which, you know, is actually very difficult. So it's all about…making sure that this is a friendly place to work for all employees.… to make sure that …. the bad comments and so on are squashed immediately by the managers. So an environment where being homophobic is not allowed. And I think that's certainly what I would like to see. … Because we've done what we need to do on the external position. We've done well on that front. But it's just on the every day how does it feel to be gay and working [here]. You know, it's the fluffy, touchy-feely stuff. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

Yeah, I think if there was anything that [the company] could do, it would be to get to their managers and tell their managers what it means to be a good GLBT employer. …. Because without the individual managers you see, the first line managers, it's out with the staff at the end of the day to make sure that that message is taken around the organisation. I don't know how far this message is getting. It's certainly getting out from a corporate point of view. People like me can hear it because it concerns me and it's certainly getting out in the press and the rest of it, I don't know whether first line managers for example know what that means. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

8.1.3 Cultural barriers

Cultural barriers were described in both general and specific terms. For example, at a general level it was suggested that there was a 'resistance to change' within organisations or a view that 'old ideas are always best'.

More specific examples of cultural barriers related to the way in which family friendly policies could be played out in a heterosexist way and to the possible clash of cultures which might arise between LGB groups and religious groups, though respondents did offer different perspectives about this.

> I think that perhaps one of the areas that I might be getting a bit concerned is that (the company) is trying to be very family friendly. And unfortunately there is a slight sort of other side of that…. you can have someone who says 'Oh, I've got to go because I've got my family crisis with my children. You haven't got children so I am sure you can step in and pick up the pieces'. So I think there is a risk that in being very family friendly to one group they could unwittingly start taking away from the work-life balance of other people. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

> I have some concerns to be honest. Perhaps partly being in the network I am not sure what happens when you put the network in the same room as the Christian or the Muslim network…...And I suppose this is one of the big problems with equality, where do you draw the lines between when one person's equality is interfering with another person's equality. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

8.1.4 Attitudinal barriers

There was a view held by some respondents that it was extremely difficult to change the attitudes of individual employees and that the efficacy of policy could still be hampered by the 'power of individuals' who could make life difficult for LGB employees. One respondent suggested that attitudes were not necessarily altered by policy literature or training and that change could be very slow and almost imperceptible. One way in which homophobic attitudes became manifest was in the reaction of non LGB staff, particularly male staff to equality groups and networks including the LGBT one:

> The male colleagues they will say 'Why is this happening, it's not fair, how come there is a women's network, there is no male network, isn't it reverse discrimination?' Things like that. And so a lot of the time, also I have one of those groups [the LGBT one], I don't feel good about them. Because a lot of people just take it as a chance to go get some free food and skive off work for a day. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

8.1.5 Enforcement barriers

Concerns were expressed about the enforcement of policy within organisations. First, respondents voiced strong concerns about the way in which organisations relied on LGB people coming forward and 'whistle blowing' and the burden and

risk of exposure that this placed on individuals experiencing harassment and discrimination (as seen in section 7.5).

> It's going to have to take a lot of LGB people to come forward and actually put themselves, their head on the block really, prepared to do this and that's the stumbling block really. Because it's going to take a lot of energy and you get seen as a militant as well. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

> Well, I think it's like any policy, isn't it. An organisation can say it's got harassment, bullying policies, we have. It's got a whistle blowing policy. But we, but I think the culture of the organisation still expects the individual that has been bullied or harassed or whatever to come forward and to you know, take that first step and then say, you know, what the problem is, what they are experiencing, why they are experiencing it. And I think that takes a lot of courage and a lot of self assurance. **(Gay man, Public sector London)**

Second, there was a view amongst some respondents that organisations needed to take a firmer line with those who were unwilling to embrace or uncomfortable with cultural change and that if necessary steps should be taken to remove them from leadership positions.

> As opposed to reacting how they feel comfortable. It's all to do with peer pressure. You know, it's a difficult nut to crack, you know, it really is but if an organisation wants to change and change its DNA, if people are unable, unwilling or uncomfortable to change fine, manage them out of the organisation. If you want the organisation to change manage those people out of the organisation. Don't start kowtowing to them. Remove them. Change them. You don't necessarily have to take them completely out of the corporation but take them out of leadership roles if that's what you want to do. And I don't see it happening. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

8.1.6 Resource barriers

When asked about barriers to policy implementation respondents also gave examples relating to resources. These included cutting initiatives and not providing sufficient funding for awareness training and LGB networks. For example LGBT network members and HR/Diversity managers acknowledged that line managers were not always happy to resource and recognise the work LGB employees did within the networks.

> Certainly my people here see this as an unnecessary distraction of my day job. They don't really recognise or appreciate the benefits of diversity. They have not understood the issues…. it's actually quite

recently that I said that we had agreed that I could do two hours a week on [LGBT network] conference calls and one day a month on more external or HR central type work and then [my manager] didn't honour that. And I felt let down…When I tried to talk to her recently, I was shouted at and told that I didn't deserve any special consideration….That I really had to decide what I wanted to do to continue with this diversity stuff or have a career. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Network members felt that they would do all this work, for the network, but when it came to their performance review, not a word would be said about it…it would be kind of overlooked or not mentioned…this is one of the areas that we are trying to raise awareness on this year. I have been very much pushing on it…people who are in the networks are doing things for the [company] and actually this is something that we want to reward. **(Senior Manager, Private sector, London)**

8.1.7 Evidential barriers

For other respondents the lack of evidence and information about LGB employees' views and experiences was a key barrier to policy implementation. Staff surveys and monitoring and evaluating LGB initiatives were suggested as ways of overcoming this problem. So long as the organisation approached this in a sensitive manner, there was broad support for the need to collect data to make LGB employees and their issues visible.

We don't have [evidence] and so we don't know. Maybe what there needs to be then is a comprehensive survey that somehow manages to ask difficult questions of LGB staff. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

8.1.8 Communication barriers

A related concern was that there were barriers to the way policy on LGB issues was communicated. This was expressed in terms of both bottom up and top down communication. A particular problem with top down communication was that it could depend on the discretion of individual managers.

So a potential barrier could be lack of sort of the willingness of ground-level workforce to actually communicate upwards. But then that would be a problem for the ground-level workforce. Maybe that the managers need to sort of say 'Keep on feeding any ideas. If there's anything that's not working, tell us'. And then we can do something about it once we are aware of it. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

Another way that information is supposed to be communicated is through managers briefings and managers have meetings and from

higher up in the Council various pieces of information are fed down to managers such as for example, the civil partnership legislation and maybe things about the staff forum. And managers are then supposed to communicate that information to their staff verbally rather than in writing. And I know for a fact because I experienced it myself, some items are missed out when managers are briefing staff. So if a manager decided that they didn't want discuss that issue then they could just skirt over it and not mention it. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

Similarly, communicating policy to new staff via induction programmes could be uneven if left to individual units or businesses within an organisation.

In theory equality and diversity is part of induction and networks should be part of induction. The problem is that currently, I would say, induction is very much left to individual businesses. So I know of contact centres, where there is a great induction, the [equality] networks are all talked about. And they could have three or four people come up to them, because obviously you have a lot of people, a high turnover, and you know, they do get people after their induction coming up and saying 'I want to know more about networks'. That isn't necessarily the case in other areas. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

8.2 What do LGB workers think makes a difference?

Respondents discussed a range of policy initiatives which they believed had been effective and valuable within organisations. These included:

8.2.1 The appointment of diversity champions – diversity champions with specific responsibility for sexual orientation had been appointed in a number of case study organisations. Those appointed were not necessarily lesbian, gay or bisexual themselves and in some cases this was seen as an advantage because they were perceived as dispassionate which lent credibility to their role. It was also thought to be important for diversity champions to be sufficiently senior in organisations to enable them to speak and act with authority.

8.2.2 Workplace campaigns highlighting inclusion and safety – in one voluntary organisation the LGB forum had spearheaded a campaign with the display of posters with positive images of LGB people in workplaces. A noteworthy feature of this campaign was that it was accompanied by training and the poster was only displayed in workplaces where training had been run. A gay man in the organisation commented on the way in which the message conveyed by the posters had encouraged him when he was interviewed for his job:

It's excellent. It's really good and as far as I know it's having a consistent roll-out, the posters are a brilliant idea. It would be great to see some more made actually. And they were very visible when I came for my interview with [the organisation] and it was great to see them and enthused me to, on my first interview, enthused me for when I came for my second. so it was really, and like I think it's really good that you can't put the posters up until the training has been implemented and that's kind of just to show it's not a tick box kind of thing, it is, you have to have the training and key members of staff have to have that training and make that commitment before they put the poster up. So it's good, really good idea. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

8.2.3 **Sponsorship of external LGB events** – organisations had sponsored pride events at both national and local level which was widely welcome by LGB respondents.

8.2.4 **Establishment of LGB groups and networks** – there were different perspectives on the role and value of groups and networks which are discussed in Chapter 9. However, there was a broad consensus amongst LGB respondents, including those who chose not to get involved, that they were an important signal of support from the organisation for LGB employees and LGB issues. Also that they had a range of roles to play both in relation to the needs of individual LGB workers and as agents for corporate change.

The best thing is this group….Because it's acknowledging that that group exists and giving it support and saying that this group of people exists in the same way that the other three groups exist. And that there may be issues around it but we need to, that we want to do something about and make sure that there aren't any issues. Yeah, I think that's the best thing it's done. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

8.2.5 **Integration of equality and diversity into job roles and performance management and appraisal systems** – examples of this were the use of diversity related competencies to assess individual performance and the inclusion of equality and diversity criteria in person specifications. A gay man in one organisation explained the impact of such criteria

I mean, this was before December 2003 and so I think that gives you a, generally a kind of good feeling but this is an organisation that recognises sexual orientation within their equalities policy statement and also is actually going beyond that and almost encouraging people to recognise it and to demonstrate their understanding and commitment to it. And so I think before I had even started here, I kind

of came in with the approach that I think this will be a tolerant employer. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

Respondents also discussed a variety of potential initiatives that they believed would promote awareness and enhance inclusion for LGB workers. These included:

8.2.6 **Anti discrimination and awareness training** – there were contrasting views as to the value of mandatory training. On the one hand it was suggested that unless training was mandatory many people including perhaps those who most needed it would opt out. On the other hand it was argued that mandatory training could lead to a 'tick-box' approach to policy implementation with little impact on culture and attitudes in practice. However there was also a commonly held view that there was an important role for awareness training particularly for managers.

I think maybe the other thing that [the company] could do…and this would be difficult to do, but to actually put managers through some kind of training where people who are out are willing to talk about their experience of being out. Because I think most people do not understand what it means to go through the whole thing of questioning your sexuality and coming to terms with that and having to tell people and having to out yourself every time somebody asks you about your husband or your opposite sex partner. People have no idea about that. And I think that there needs to be some awareness training to say, you know, think about how you react to people. Think about the difficulties that people can be going through. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

8.2.7 **Promotion of same sex benefits** – perhaps not surprisingly given that these were 'good practice' organisations, a wide range of same sex benefits had been put in place within the case study organisations. Although public sector workers expressed disappointment at what they perceived as the ongoing discrimination against LGB people within public sector pension schemes. It was thought that the level of awareness of these benefits varied considerably and respondents typically suggested that they acquainted themselves with them on a need to know basis.

I think it would do them absolutely no harm…. to increase awareness ...saying for example things on like work-life balance, special leave, paternity leave, maternity leave, whichever you want and say that these are all open to all employees in the same way as they are to same sex couples, to single parents. I certainly would think that that if anything it would be a model of good practice. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

8.2.8 **Use of intranet/web pages** – One way of promoting awareness of same sex benefits and LGB equality policies was via intranet pages. Some case study organisations and groups/networks had taken steps to use this facility to set up group pages and contact lists. These tended to be more advanced in the private sector organisations. In an organisation which had not done so, it was suggested that it would be an effective way of promoting awareness of policies affecting LGB staff, particularly reaching those LGB employees not out at work.

I mean, for me I would have, you know, a specific web page, specifically targeted at LGB staff where information and contact information can be sought immediately without having to look for posters or contact details, and maybe contacts of the LGB group and you know, how you can join and when the next meetings are. So it's kind of like instant access to stuff rather than having to look in all different places. With regards to the policy, I think at the moment the policy we've got is fine. You know, it does cover people with their sexual orientation. And maybe just making staff a bit more aware that, you know, there are LGB staff and just be a bit more mindful of that… You know, I suppose maybe just promoting it a bit more within the [organisation] would be nice. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

8.2.9 **LGB role models** – role models particularly at senior levels within organisations were seen as an important way of increasing the visibility of LGB workers' experiences and legitimising policy.

I don't think we have a lack of resources. I think what we need is more out executives as role models from the GLBT community. I think those role models are incredibly important. And you know, I'd like to think that the company will always promote the best person for the job and I don't believe that, I don't believe that the reason that we don't have GLBT execs as many as we would like, especially here in Europe is because…they have been discriminated against. But I would just so love it if we could have more senior execs who are GLBT particularly in Europe. In the States they have got a plethora of them. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

8.2.10 Mentoring – similarly mentoring initiatives were seen as a way of promoting inclusion particularly for younger LGB workers.

I think with issues of sexuality it would be nice if you could do that, if somebody says 'I am out and I am gay' in training to pair them up with a mentor who is either gay or lesbian who can then give them a little extra support that would support the diversity programme. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

> I like to see proactive encouragement and sponsorship and funding for mentoring for younger LGBT employers, people who have just come in, who maybe only just come out, struggling with their sexuality, and helping them and offering career mentoring as well. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

8.2.11 Marketing – while there was some cynicism expressed about the business case approach, it was also argued that LGB workers welcomed marketing initiatives aimed at LGB people because they provided positive and 'gay friendly' signals to the workforce and the LGB staff in particular.

> I think I would perhaps like to see [the company] perhaps becoming more active in the gay market. I think gay people who work here, I think overall we can take this as a fairly gay friendly place, I don't think [the company] is yet using that to actually try and pitch into gay markets itself as we are a gay friendly company. I think, Qantas has sort of done this to an extent. You can't board a Qantas flight without being shown the Sydney Mardi Gras. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

8.2.12 Recruitment advertising – another way of demonstrating policy commitment suggested by respondents was targeted recruitment advertising.

> From obviously the advertising that they do for the recruitment side of thing where they are advertising in the gay press and that kind of thing. I think that was quite good. I know the police service do it as well but I…haven't really seen any big organisation specifically targeting sort of the gay and lesbian market…I haven't seen that before. So I think that's sort of quite good for showing that they are keen and not paying lip service. And they've actually taken the time to come up with the advertising campaign and spend the money in the press and the right press as well because they have not just put it into newspapers but actually specific magazines and that kind of thing to target the kind of people they want to target. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

8.2.13 Sexual orientation monitoring – Both LGB respondents and national/organisational key informants expressed a range of views about the desirability and efficacy of sexual orientation. For example concerns were expressed about the maintenance of confidentiality and what such information might be used for, and some employers spoke of discomfort amongst mangers on the issue and and a reluctance to ask 'potentially invasive' questions. On the other hand it was suggested by both LGB respondents and key informants, that in an appropriate context and if done sensitively and with consultation, it could provide a means of evidencing changes in practice and

understanding the make up of the workforce. There was evidence that where it had been introduced in this way it could be seen as a positive indicator of the employer's commitment to LGB employees.

I was really surprised to see [the question on the application form]. That's the first time in my life that I've ever seen that's ever had that on there which I thought was, you know, pretty cool really, I thought, for an organisation to have that one there. I thought it was quite pleasing really that they are sort of quite forward thinking employer really. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

8.3 How do LGB workers want to be treated at work?

LGB respondents offered a range of perspectives about how they would ideally like to be treated at work. These are summarised in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Treatment at work

- Person rather than sexuality centred approach
- Avoidance of stereotypes
- Same not different
- Equal approach
- Acknowledgement of sexuality
- Understanding of sexuality

A common perspective was a desire to be treated as a multi-faceted person with a range of characteristics and experiences as opposed to making the assumption that an LGB person's identity was defined by his or her sexuality.

Deal with me, not my sexuality. You know, my sexuality really has, I feel, not a lot to do with my work. It can affect how I work...as I know from the past. You know, not being cool about my sexuality affected how I worked. But now that I am in that very, very big comfort zone that I am very, very happy as to where I am, just accept me as a person. That's all I ask for…take me as a whole not just because of this one little part of me which is just my sexuality. It's nice to be, it's like an integrated person.' **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

A related concern was that colleagues and managers should avoid making stereotypical assumptions and judgments. Respondents also emphasized the importance of being treated equally and in the same way as other colleagues. One respondents simply said 'I just want them to treat me as they would treat their friends. Because I am not really that much different.' A contrasting though not necessarily mutually exclusive standpoint was that LGB workers wanted their sexuality to be acknowledged and understood by colleagues and managers.

Central to this view was the need for people not to make assumptions and to take responsibility.

> I don't like it when people assume my partner is male. But that's probably because I then get embarrassed about wanting to correct them and whether I should correct them and if other people are stood around who know my partner is female, they don't know whether to correct them. And it just ends up in this kind of embarrassed silence where nobody quite knows what they are supposed to say. What I would appreciate which I don't think many people do is make that correction for me but then they don't know whether they've got permission to do that so I can understand why they don't. I would like them to think that they've automatically got that permission but then if it's with service users I wouldn't want them to do it so it's a bit of a quandary for them. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

8.4 The impact of a gay friendly environment

As Figure 8.2 shows, the overwhelming majority (81.6%) of LGB respondents within our sample felt that working in a gay friendly environment had a direct impact on their job satisfaction. Table 8.3 provides a summary of the way respondents described the impact of both positive and negative environments.

Table 8.3: Impact of organisational and workplace environment	
Impact of positive environment	**Impact of negative environment**
- Happiness and openness - Freedom to speak - Greater confidence - Feel supported - Work productivity and effectiveness - Enhances enjoyment of job - Feel pride in organisation	- Frustration and ignorance - Exclusion - Ostracism - Self censorship - Difficulty concentrating - Desire to leave

8.4.1 Working in a positive environment

At the most basic level the impact of working in a positive or gay friendly environment was described by respondents as making them feel happier at work. This was often related to the fact that a positive environment enabled LGB workers to come out and have the freedom to speak about what they wanted. Thus it facilitated greater openness, which some respondents contrasted with previous experiences of being 'hesitant' and having to be 'careful' and 'guarded'

about what they said to managers and colleagues. In turn this led to enhanced job satisfaction, which was said to improve productivity and effectiveness.

> I certainly feel more comfortable in myself. I mean, if I compare it to what was happening previously, I was having to be very careful about things I was saying all the time. I was having to be very careful and trying to keep things hidden. Whereas now I am much more open so I don't have to guard against things that I am saying. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Figure 8.2: Working in a 'gay friendly' environment has a direct impact on my job satisfaction
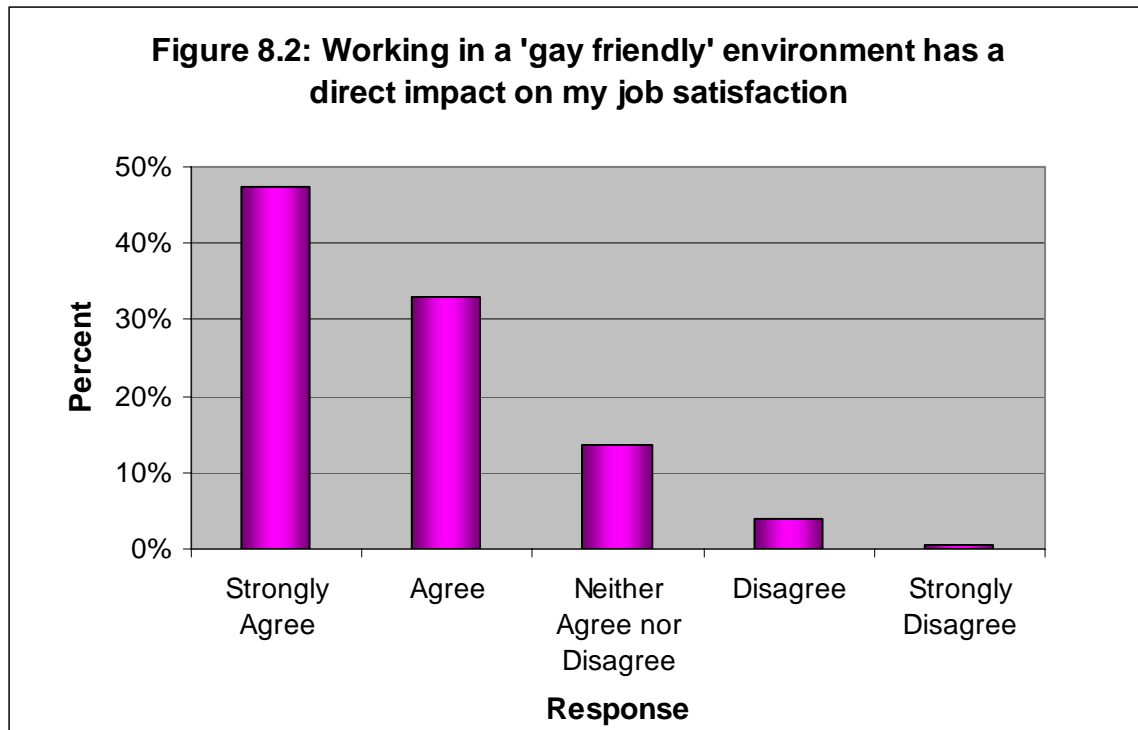
For some respondents the experience was one of growing more comfortable over time, though this was still punctuated with painful moments:

> I guess there is still the moments where I think oh, this is going to be a painful moment because somebody is going to put their foot in it or something like that but they are just moments and not a constant. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, Yorkshire)**

The positive spin offs of feeling more comfortable at work were described as enabling greater focus and concentration on the job as opposed to extraneous factors and greater confidence in everyday dealings with colleagues.

> I actually now am so much more confident, so much more comfortable, working with people. Because when you go to a meeting or whatever, and you get that general chitchat at the beginning, people will ask. And

they will ask about you know, what did you do with your partner this weekend. It is like perfectly natural for me now. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

A related impact was that LGB workers felt supported by the organisation because they were confident that discrimination would be challenged.

What [the company] has done is helped me with communication skills and negotiating skills and also because it is so publicly supportive of diversity it gives you the assurance that you are going to get backed up if you have a problem, which is very important you feel, you know, particularly and I have to say particularly at very senior executive levels in the company, you know that they support this totally and also one thing I do feel about [the company], I know it will not tolerate discrimination. I don't think it gets enough credit for that actually. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

LGB respondents talked of the ways in which they were better able to perform at work, the ways in which the organisation had retained them and made them feel positive to and loyal to their employer. For example, following the introduction of gay friendly policies, respondents had felt encouraged to join the LGBT network and to 'risk' coming out.

I think the main thing is, the important thing to know is that I didn't want to work in the industry for much longer because…it was too much of a strain not being out. And I thought well, I might as well come out… so unbeknown to the company they have actually kept me… Yes, and the longer you are out, the more comfortable you are…just be upfront because the other ways haven't worked… Closeting. It just doesn't work, it's no fun, people can't interact with it. You've got to interact. To interact means that you get on with people. If you get on with people that means you are a team player. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

You know, there is all the other attendant risks of leaving your company to join another one but actually that you might meet a management team that were homophobic or one of the team…was really quite frightening. And I think now because I'm older and more comfortable and much more sure of myself, it would be different. And also it's different because the climate is different... but there are two factors that I would say have stopped me from moving from the company and one of them is that and the other is a final salary pension. Which is probably the number one factor that keeps me here now. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Where respondents were thinking of moving jobs, they were unlikely to settle for less than their current employer provided in terms of LGBT benefits and a gay friendly working environment.

> If the company is not offering equal benefits to my partner…then… something is very wrong there basically…when it comes to your partner actually receiving the same medical benefits that a heterosexual partner would be than that to me is not really negotiable…This is practical. If I am going to something I want to be able to take someone. I don't always want, if I have a work conference I don't always want to be the person who is on their own all the time. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

8.4.2 Working in a negative environment

In contrast working in a negative environment was described as potentially reducing job satisfaction and compromising the ability of LGB workers to do their jobs.

> Whereas if you are in a homophobic environment you are not allowed to look at anyone or do anything or you got to be just like a robot…. if you are not allowed to openly express your sexuality you are withholding, you are having to repress a big part of yourself and it just makes the whole work experience less fun, less pleasurable because you are just a robot, you are just there doing the job you are paid for and you can't give anything else of your personality. And of course, your personality is required to do the job effectively. You know, you've got to have people skills. And if you are having to repress a big part of your personality you are also repressing a big part of your skills. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Some respondents who said they felt comfortable at work pointed out that if their situations changed and they found themselves working in an uncomfortable environment they would have to move on.

> I couldn't have any job satisfaction if I didn't feel safe and comfortable and also, being quite a chatty, sociable person, if I couldn't be open and have a laugh with my colleagues then I wouldn't want to go to work in the morning. It's as simple as that. And that involves talking about your social life and your private life. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

Respondents described feeling angry and frustrated by negative attitudes. At the level of the workplace negative impacts could result in ostracism described by one respondent as a 'wall of silence' from straight colleagues.

A non gay friendly organisational culture was also said to have resulted in exclusion, which called into question the efficacy of policy.

> The culture of the organisation I don't think is naturally gay-friendly or necessarily the senior managers. So I think if you want to get on, I think, the policies are there to protect you but I think in practice, I think there are some attitudes just down to individuals and I think there is this sort of the networking which you are excluded from, not deliberately but just the way it all works. … so I think the policies are fine but in practice it's different. **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

In contrast to the positive impact of a gay friendly environment and inclusive attitudes, homophobic experiences were reported to have hampered concentration and adversely affected work output.

> To be honest it's worn me down a bit. Being out, fine, but when you get this day in, day out for weeks on end, it really does wear you down. And I've been at the point where I've really wanted to move on to a different job. It's not completely because of that, I mean, I want to advance my career as well which I can't really do in my position. But that's giving me more incentive to look for other work really. At times it's made me really annoyed which of course did have an effect on my activities really. I mean, at times it's made it harder to concentrate. I kept feeling why should I be taking this? **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

Key points

- In general the case study employers in this study were seen as 'gay friendly' in policy and practice. However, there was evidence of a perceived implementation gap amongst respondents in the sample. A majority (81.1%) of the sample strongly agreed/agreed that their employer was gay friendly in policy and nearly two thirds (62.7%) strongly agreed/agreed that their employer was gay friendly in practice.

- Perceived barriers to policy implementation related to a range of factors: policy promotion; managerial commitment; cultural conflicts; attitudes to LGB employees; enforcement; resources; the availability of evidence and communication.

- Respondents highlighted a variety of policy initiatives that they believed had made a difference; the appointment of diversity champions; workplace campaigns highlighting inclusion and safety; sponsorship pf external LGB events; the establishment of LGB groups and networks and the integration of equality and diversity into job roles and performance management systems.

- Respondents also identified a range of possible initiatives which they felt would make a difference: anti discrimination training; the promotion of same sex benefits; the use of the intranet to communicate policy and practice; the presence of senior LGB role models; mentoring for LGB employees; better resourcing of LGB groups and networks; marketing to LGB customers and clients and targeted recruitment advertising.

- Respondents offered various perspectives on how they would like to be treated at work: a person centered rather than sexuality centered approach; the avoidance of stereotyping; equal treatment and not being treated differently and an understanding and acknowledgement of diverse sexualities.

- Respondents overwhelmingly believed that working in a 'gay friendly' environment had a positive impact on their job satisfaction. The perceived benefits of working in a positive environment were: greater happiness and openness; the freedom to speak; greater confidence; feeling supported; improved work productivity and effectiveness; enhanced job enjoyment and a feeling of loyalty and pride in the organisation.

- Working in a negative environment was seen to lead to frustration; exclusion; ostracism; self-censorship; problems with concentration and ultimately a desire to leave.

Chapter 9: Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' experiences of groups and networks

One of the key initiatives introduced within public, private and voluntary sector organisations as well as trade unions seeking to progress LGB issues has been the establishment of LGBT networks/groups.

Lesbian and gay workers have campaigned for self organised groups and union structures within their unions since the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s unions began to establish forms of LGBT self organisation. Over time unions have worked to improve LGBT representation and incorporate LGBT issues within the trade union agenda as instanced by the establishment of a national motion-based TUC LGBT conference in 1998 and the introduction of an LGBT seat on the TUC General Council in 2000.[30]

During the late 1990s public, private and voluntary sector organisations began to include sexual orientation within their equal opportunity/managing diversity policies. Increasingly they have also seen it as a key part of their remit to develop a diverse and inclusive workforce (including LGBT workers) in order to develop and provide services and products appropriate to a diverse community including LGBT service users and customers.[31] This has often included the establishment of an LGB employee network.

Organisation LGBT groups can overlap with their trade union counterparts as they work to encourage networking, visibility, representation and to propose changes to discriminatory policies and benefits and tackle areas of social exclusion within the organisation. In particular, networks can provide a safe, supportive environment to LGB employees who are not prepared to be out within the organisation while providing a valuable mechanism for consulting LGB employees about employment and service issues. LGB people who are willing to take on representative positions become out and visible within the organisation which in turn may encourage other LGB employees to become members of the network and/or come out themselves. [32]

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[30] Colgan, F. (1999b) 'Recognising the lesbian and gay constituency in UK trade unions: moving forward in UNISON? *Industrial Relations Journal*, 30: 5: 444-463; TUC (2000) *Straight Up! Why the Law Should Protect Lesbian and Gay Workers*, London: TUC; TUC (2004) *Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Workers: Know Your Rights*, London: TUC.

[31] Local Government Employers Organisation (2003) *Sexuality- the New Agenda: A Guide for Local Authorities on Engaging with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Communities*, London: Dialog, LGEO; Ward, J. and Winstanley, D. (2003) 'The absent presence: Negative space within discourse and construction of minority sexual identity in the workplace', *Human Relations*, 56: 10: 1255-1280.

[32] Stonewall (2005) *Network Groups, Stonewall Workplace Guides: London.*

This chapter will first consider LGBT staff groups and networks before moving on to consider union LGBT groups. Respondents identified a range of functions fulfilled by LGB staff and trade union groups and networks as identified in Table 9.1. However, these were not seen as mutually exclusive as demonstrated across all three sectors and trade union groups by the examples aims and objectives illustrated in Figures 9.1 – 9.5.

Table 9.1: Functions of LGB organisation and trade union groups/networks
- Social function   - Networking function   - Support function   - Policy development function   - Expert practice function   - Mentoring and training function   - Financial support/Campaigning function   - Negotiation function (trade unions)

The social function was rarely identified as an end in itself, but more typically identified as part of a range of functions, particularly in relation to the ability to network with other lesbian, gay and bisexual colleagues, both formally and informally.

> I think probably the pivotal thing they did was the creation of the network group. Not necessarily because it gives you a social group that you can go and mix with. But it does mean that you have a feeling that there is a point within [the company] that you can go to if you need to and you know that that group is supported by [the company]. And I think around that they have actually done quite a lot of things such as they do organise social events but when the partnership legislation went through they arranged a presentation on the partnership legislation that you could just go along and explain to it, and they had somewhere there from HR who was explaining what (the company) would be doing to change its HR policies to fit in with this. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

The networking function of groups was described as enabling lesbian, gay and bisexual people to discuss shared concerns and problems and to provide support to those who needed it. For many this was the main way that they had been put in touch with other LGB people at work. Within the private sector organisations, networking could occur via a LGBT website which increased the opportunities for access from those in more isolated work locations.

> And the other thing is the…networking type of issue… I don't have anybody here who is LGB but I now know people who are that I could

talk to and network and obviously don't mind being known within that grouping as such. So there is a kind of networking angle. And knowing that you are not alone, that you know, there are other people out there. Who have similar worries and concerns. And also I think to a certain extent as well, certainly from the central group, what we are trying to do as well is to be kind of role models and say look it is okay, you know, you can be, you can come out and it is okay and we can support you in that. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

I have a whole new network of friends now. I call them friends because they are. A whole bunch of people that, you know, I was not meeting before and do now and instead of knowing people just in the sector in which I work, I know people across the company now. Some I see regularly, some I see occasionally, I chat with many of them on, we've got an internal [LGBT] chat facility. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

Within national organisations, LGBT groups have set up regional structures to try to facilitate networking close to where people worked and lived.

So it was still seen as a very London-centric thing so one of the things that we were trying to do is try to first of all assign some people from different location areas, to act as location contacts. And then it was part of their responsibility to encourage new people who showed an interest in the social group and also the wider GLBT group, because there are different parts, you can be part of the GLBT community and the social group is a sub-section of that. And it was to actively encourage new members when they came on board to pass their details to these location coordinators if they wanted to and begin to bring them on board to meet other GLBT people in [the company] **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Providing support to lesbian, gay and bisexual employees via a staff group or network was seen as important because it provided a means of enabling them to feel 'comfortable' within the organisation. For some respondents this was seen as distinct from, and more important than, the social function.

I have mixed attitudes about it because a lot of people see it as kind of a social thing. And I would be more of the opinion that it should be a support network first and foremost. So people who are having issues maybe specifically to do with harassment who need to know where to go, a guidance basically or someone they know that is able to advice them on policy and stuff. A social aspect is good as well but what I would like to see happening is just so people can see that there is something there that is positive and that's within the company and the issue isn't completely ignored. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Certainly we offer ourselves as openly GLBT people to discuss any issues that people might have in the workforce. Particularly something related to GLBT and we can maybe refer them in the right direction. But we also include on our pages links to programmes within [the company], we've got like an Employee Relations Programme which is confidential which people can take advantage if and they can speak to and talk about anything, you know, it can be financial, it can be personal. We also have a programme…which means that anyone can raise an issue about anything they want. And again, this can be anonymous, confidential etc. They can ask for some response from that from a second or third line manager if you want. So there's lots of different avenues but we certainly open ourselves for people to contact. And we do get people to contact us. You know, very, quite personal questions sometimes about, you know, things they are involved with at work or particular financial problems they've got or problems with people in the workforce and you know, health problems as well. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Amongst local authority respondents, there was also a perspective that the support function could be both internally focussed i.e. towards lesbian, gay and bisexual employees experiencing problems, and externally focussed i.e. to lesbian, gay and bisexual people within the community.

I would like to see a better, you know, strengthened staff group for lesbian and gay people…We do need to spend a bit more time and effort on how we support staff to be out. I, you know, I am still shocked that people won't move departments because they are not out or are uncomfortable about being out in certain departments. I would like to see how we…support staff on that sort of thing. And generally across [the organization] I would like to see where we engage with the lesbian and gay community…we need to outreach to, you know, your Joe Bloggs out there who goes to work, who lives with a partner, comes home everyday, has his tea and watches the TV or whatever and pops to Waitrose at the weekend. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

Providing a support network was also seen as giving a strong signal to lesbian, gay and bisexual staff that there was a forum that they could become part of. And this was related to a the wider role of working to make an organisation a safe place to work for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

I would like to see the role of the forum increased actually because I think it's like a check on across the whole organisation and that's whether people are working in Head Office, regional office, or [elsewhere] to make sure that [initiatives] are implemented which is the making sure that it's a safe place …. to work for gay people. And making sure that is adhered to as a result of the training and the

posters that are up and that it's visible and I think that's what its role, it defines itself as and being a support network for employees to come together and to be sociable and talk to people who are in the same boat as you every so often. And also to push forward on within the workplace aspects of equality and diversity in relation to gay people. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London**)

Some respondents highlighted the policy development function as a priority. This function involved the group working as an agency for change within the organisation both by influencing and monitoring the development and implementation of policy and providing a conduit for consultation and communication with lesbian, gay and bisexual staff.

It's the issue around being able to influence the policies that the organisation puts in place to deal with both the non-discrimination and harassment side. And the up and coming December 2005 Partnership Regulations. To make sure that they are, that they have an informed consultation, that they have informed views on what should happen there and that I may be able to make a difference with that, and having an HR background anyway. I think the group itself will monitor what happens in terms of the policies and procedures and have a say in that. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

[The] primary role is to ensure that things are getting changed and people get to know what's in place like for example on HIV, and getting feedback from the people there. So that the policy can be written and the policy can be put in place. Sharing information where possible. Letting people know what's going on. Because a lot of the time projects and people are very busy to actually, know everything that is going on. So they were, we are helping them by giving them the information they need. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector)**

We are looking much more now around being involved in policy development and making sure that we are using a consultation type role when new policies and procedures are being developed to make sure that the policies meet the needs of the LGBT staff. So the role has become a lot wider. We put on, we had our first conference last year, last November, which was specifically around the new Sexual Orientation Regulations. So yeah, its roots are from the grassroots section of the organisation, you know, being project workers that started it but it's become a lot more involved in the running of the organisation now. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

Within global organisations, these discussions could take place at international LGBT forum meetings or via LGBT groups from a range of countries getting together. Countries with more developed LGBT networks were able to assist

those getting started with advice and contacts. The LGBT forums could feed views into the global corporate equality and diversity structures through their LGBT representatives.

Within one voluntary organisation in particular, the policy development function of the group had extended to that of practice development, influencing the way the organisation responded to the needs of, and worked with, LGB service users.

> The role is both support for lesbian and gay workers in the organisation and a focus for practice issues so that we can ensure that there is a lesbian and gay slant and perspective and employment issues.…. But there may be very specific issues that it can become…a useful conduit because then people know they are not on their own in dealing with this but also there will be people who have more experience and who know what strategies you can use to facilitate change. So that's the importance of it. It's also somewhere for the organisation to get a perspective that they otherwise might not get. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector)**

LGBT groups provided a resource for training and development within their organisations, by advising on training, running workshops, being prepared to talk on training programmes about being LGBT in the workforce. A more recent development was the advent of LGBT 'mentoring' programmes.

> We set up a mentoring programme last year. Led by a couple of people in the organisation. And what that involves is first of all identifying mentors, people who'd be willing to act as mentors… that were GLBT. And we then actively promoted, we developed a programme around that whereby we identified people who wanted to be mentored as well. And it was a case of linking those two bits together and this is meant to be an extension of the existing mentoring programme in [the company] anyway…And we managed to try and work alongside the existing mentoring programme to have a GLBT mentoring scheme that can actually tell them a bit about [the company] as a GLBT employer but also provide some personal and professional guidance as well. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

LGBT groups certainly had also worked internally and externally to encourage their employer to take a more gay friendly stance in policy and practice.

> The first few years…were all about trying to make sure that [the company] is on line with same sex partnerships within…all the benefit side of it…The second thing that we did was externally… we did a lot of work externally, set up the inter-bank forum, the investment bank forum that meets every two months and we'd discuss issues and try

and get best practice from others. And discussing ideas and showing solutions etcetera. Actually that inter-bank forum is probably why the investment bank community now is absolutely roaring ahead in terms of LGBT issues and networks etcetera. Mainly because we've tried to create best practice within the industry and then looked to other industries in terms of making sure that we're keeping as far ahead as possible. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

LGB employees were happy to see their organisations making links with other LGBT network groups to promote a more gay friendly environment. This included funding and sponsoring external LGB organisations to run community cultural events, services and campaigns such as LGBT film, cultural and book festivals, Pride events, anti bullying and health campaigns, international LGBT organisations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) etc.

A common concern amongst respondents however was that groups or networks were not sufficiently representative of particular groups of LGB people. There were pockets of employees who firstly, did not feel able to be 'out,' secondly, groups experiencing 'multiple discrimination' were less likely to be 'out' and thirdly, those working in frontline and manual jobs had difficulty getting time off from their managers to attend LGBT meetings during working time. As a result, one criticism was that organisational LGBT group membership often tended to be skewed towards male, managerial and professional workers.

We are a little group, aren't we?…not representative of the whole of the council workforce. And what the forum never managed to do is break out of that boundary. And you know, they were the people who probably needed it least if you like… we are all, you know, maybe slightly more senior people who are busy, you know, it's just not a call on our time. I think that's possibly why it's failed, it never broke out of that boundary. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

I mean it's a little bit disconcerting that the room is just full of guys. And there's a different energy that they have…I think, it's difficult enough being a woman in …banking. But you can't hide that. If you then add on your second, you know, minority, not exactly a popular position to be in…probably not wanting to do something which would jeopardise any career advancement. And so I think it's a case of a double whammy issue…I think it is really important is to emphasise that the lesbian issue, this whole wave of cultural change within corporates for gay people, is just not hitting the mark for gay women. **(Lesbian, Private sector, London)**

There are issues around who can be involved and who can't be. One of the issues is if you are project worker and you are not out, how do you get to the forums? How do you get to the conference? How are

you going to be able to access that? And it's one thing for [the company] to say it's reasonable for people to be able to have time to do those things, it's another thing entirely if you are not out. And that's something that we've had in discussion lots of times, how do you get to the people who are not out. And all you can do is make sure that you broadcast to everybody that this meeting is taking place. And as I say, we always say when stuff goes out 'If you have a difficulty about being able to talk to your manager about this, please contact us and we will facilitate it', you know, and we have been able to do that in the past **(Gay Man, Voluntary sector, London)**

Another critical but minority view was that LGB groups and networks might be perceived by non-LGB staff as exclusive or secretive.

But I think there's a lot of mistrust over the secrecy and the confidentiality that goes on. I think it's, and what I brought up at this first meeting, what worries me is that there is this perception where gay people might stick together in a sort of gay mafia and all the rest of it and the way this was all set up to me looked a little bit like that. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

In one voluntary sector organisation the group had responded to this concern by opening up its meetings and events to non-LGB people.

Mainly because we don't want to segregate ourselves off from everybody else. We don't want it to be seen as "Oh, that's just the gay group". We want it to be open for everybody so that everybody feels comfortable to come and even if it is just for a chat about whatever, they still feel comfortable to attend. And get the information they need really. And so far it's working quite well, we haven't had any problems or issues or anything. **(Lesbian, Voluntary sector, London)**

9.1   Trade union LGBT groups

Trade union LGB(T) groups had been established in a number of unions since the late 1980s. As a consequence, many respondents in their 40s and 50s held positive views based on their experience of trade union LGB groups and forums during the 1990s. For this group, trade unions such as BIFU, CWU, FBU, NUT and UNISON, were seen to have been in the forefront in campaigning for LGB issues before many employers had really begun to recognise or address the issues.

I'd say it's probably very important but I don't know what it would have been like otherwise…. So I hear stories about other people working in situations where it has been a problem…Some people might have been involved and some have actually left….I have never been in that

situation so I've never had to turn to the union for support. But that might be because if it wasn't for the likes of NALGO and then UNISON and the way society has moved on…that I might have needed the support. So I don't know what it would have been like without it. So my feeling is that yes, it's important and going to conference more than anything else is a bit like going to Gay Pride, it's a big feel good factor because you are not the only person…in a minority, you are in a huge number of people and it does give you that sort of, I don't know, feeling of well-being and solidarity and not ….marginalisation. **(Gay Man, Union representative and LGBT group member, Public Sector)**

This was less frequently the case with younger LGB respondents and those who did not have a positive perception of their union's work in the area. One gay man for example described his union's activities as 'absolutely nil in this area'. Criticisms focused on the complete absence of LGB representation and/or a 'macho' or negative profile on LGB issues locally even where it was recognised that the national union was doing work in the area.

I have been invited to attend gay and lesbian conferences, again that's weekends mostly and when it's during the week there is no way I could attend. I get some paperwork every now and again, different changes that the union are making or have made. If I get time to read through it, I look through it … This plant suffered a lot about five or six years ago that gay and lesbian people were not recognised here. And I think the union didn't help it… Because it's a really macho image of the union, the macho image. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

To my knowledge there is nobody out in the steward committees that I deal with, either GMB or UNISON. I don't know of any people that are out in either of those hierarchies. Or any union activists. I don't think here are any lesbian or gay out people to my knowledge. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

However, views varied by union, sector and how active and supportive local representatives were seen to be.

Well, as I say, they actively advertise these equality weekends there's sort of workshops and things….I think, yeah, there's a poster up on the wall advertising the up and coming weekends. And they send out media and we get bulletins, we get in-house magazines that come around as well with the details on. And the Fire Brigade Union you get a magazine once every three months as well. And you get newsletters and actions, you know, what's going to happen next, you know, in terms of maybe industrial strikes or pay rises we get. That sort of side of things, you are quite well informed, really. I think they have email systems as well to inform people, you can sign up for that as well **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

The union LGBT group, its mailing list and activities was more often cited by those working in the manual, skilled trades and frontline areas as an important source of support, networking, representation and education than the organisational LGBT group.

> The union is very, very good. I have to sing the union's praises because last year I was the equality officer for the union. I wanted to be the lesbian and gay officer but because we are only a small branch I ended up being the equality officer which is loads and loads of work …But the union is absolutely fantastic. They really, really are. They've got a massive gay section….everybody is gay-friendly. I mean, I have been to conferences in London, Lesbian and Gay TUC and we've got representatives from the CWU who are as straight as anything and they come to lesbian and gay conferences. And they come out with us at night, absolutely fantastic…. And that is all because of, it's enabled through the culture of the union and I can't sing their praises enough, I really can't, I think they are fantastic, the union. **(Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

In a few cases, the union had been pivotal in assisting young LGB people in manual and skilled trades to recognise their sexuality, develop confidence through union activities and come out at work.

> I was very timid and nervous up until that point, it certainly gave me a lot more confidence over the years. I mean, the first couple of courses I went on I actually went with a colleague from work….it was while on that course looking through a list of courses that it mentioned that there was a lesbian and gay weekend that the union hold… I duly applied to go on that. Joined their contact list and… I remember driving up…for this weekend seminar and there was a couple of occasions on my way up there that I stopped thinking is this the right thing or shall I turn around and go home…. And the following year I went back to the union seminar again, the second one…Then I discovered that there was actually a vacancy on the LGBT advisory committee of the union which I subsequently applied for and got the post….went along to my first meeting…and after the meeting finished we all went out into London and into, the first time actually I had been into a London gay pub. ….I had the confidence to do all sorts of stuff I never did before…. that was a good learning curve about being out at work… and having done that course I came back. I think I was more or less convinced now that this is stupid leading two separate lives **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Although, it was admitted that there had been some union concerns when employers had begun to set up organizational LGBT groups and Forums given that the unions perceived they had made a 'head start' in the area, LGB union

members and representatives seemed to have accepted that there was space for both and so where time permitted appeared to be members and feed information as appropriate between the two.

> Yeah, there is crossover, we made a deliberate thing…we wanted people to know that there were union people there working on stuff…it was from a position this is what's going to be and we didn't want to set ourselves up against it…We've got several people in the union who are actually in the union structures who are also active in the [LGBT group]. And there is a social aspect to it. **(Lesbian union representative, Private sector, London)**

> I think the important part of it is that because UNISON comes from that perspective and it's engrained within it and it has the opportunities for people to be organised and to be politicised… If you look at the sort of documentation that comes out of UNISON in terms of attending conferences, for instance, the whole equalities agenda is something which we are able to learn from and bring into [the organisation]… It's useful to both because what we are able to do is to bring that documentation in for discussion and…we don't have to reinvent the wheel…e.g. the stuff that was around Section 28… so there is a lot of work either way. We were able to use somebody from the National Committee to come along to the last Black and Gay workers forum to give a presentation on the Sexual Orientation Discrimination Act within the new employment laws so we have done a lot of that cross fertilising… **(Gay man union representative, Voluntary sector, London)**

> When we have get-togethers rather than sort of differentiating that this is an Authority meeting, this is an FBU meeting, we combine the two and that way, you know, we talk about issues because effectively if it's affecting us on the uniformed side, it's affecting people on the non-uniformed side and vice versa and normally they will go into the melting pot together, that way we get a two-pronged attack from the FBU, the organisational group and obviously we can raise issues within the FBU then as well. As I say it's far more organised, it's far more commitment behind it, it's supported far better by the union structures both, if our management would bring half the commitment that the FBU puts behind this with the groups, you know, I think we'd be up and running and laughing, you know. And I think we would have a proper effective support network. **(Gay man union representative, Public sector, London)**

However, union representatives while broadly supportive of organisational LGBT groups did point to their shortcomings in the employment context when it came to negotiation and political campaigning.

We made a political decision at that Advisory committee that employee networks have a limited use in progressing things….there are things it's probably useful for and there are things it doesn't intend to do. **(Lesbian, union representative, Private sector, London)**

Well, I feel, I have always felt that UNISON is led by example. In the sense that it's always made clear by its non-discriminatory equal opportunities policies at all levels both amongst activists and members. And it's also got, it acts like a policeman, and I see that as my role as being a UNISON steward. And I think management sometimes, they pay lip service to things **(Gay man, union representative, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

In terms of working conditions and stuff like that there are some good policies in [the company], the union organisation and following through those agreements is what makes the thing real…the equality stuff can vary just as all other things vary in terms of stuff like that can happen even if it's against policy…there is a reality gap in terms of [the company] says we are an equal opportunities employer because obviously large numbers of their managers will not follow that through and they do train them. But also there is a little bit of an image thing here, [the company] is good at corporate relations, public relations and says the right thing… and my experience as a union negotiator [is that] there are certain [training packages] that are compulsory, obviously safety and things around regulations and any similar things…there are equality sections that are compulsory, we asked that the LGBT package should be compulsory too and were told no. **(Lesbian, union representative, Private sector, London)**

Another cause for concern from the union side was the representativeness of organisational LGBT networks when it came to consultation and policy formation. Also ideological differences on some of the more 'commercial' activities organisational LGBT groups took on.

I find it all a bit haphazard because obviously your average person especially if you are not a manager, you are not even getting time off to attend these things…So it's all very much where you work whether you get involved and there is, I must say, an abundance of managers in the [LGBT group] and also the constant use of the network by managers almost like as a focus group for lesbian and gay customers which I think confuses their role. I am not against, it's better that things happen than that they don't happen, but I think they are of limited use in pushing forward. **(Lesbian, union representative, Private sector, London)**

These tensions in some joint areas of work were also acknowledged by those active in organisation LGBT groups in terms of how closely to work with the unions.

> It's something we haven't really tapped into as a staff group, I will be perfectly honest. We did, for a lot of meetings, we arranged a number of speakers, we did have a speaker that came from UNISON to speak to the group… but this is just my view, I don't know how this would be viewed by senior HR. **(Gay man, LGBT group, public sector, London)**

Nevertheless, union LGB representatives were keen to work constructively with organizational LGBT networks and employers to progress LGB and broader equality issues. A current area of discussion was monitoring where the unions thought it was important for management and union to work together to create an appropriate organisational climate to permit sexual orientation monitoring to be introduced.

Finally, a big difference between organizational LGBT groups and union LGBT groups was the access union groups had to a national and international negotiating and campaigning role with the potential to play a role in fighting for LGBT rights and issues although some respondents wanted to see their unions taking a more high profile role in this area.

> On the whole issue of the partnership rights, the union, I think, did do a good job. …there seems to be nothing getting pushed at the moment about what they are doing now about the pension rights….it should be as a recruitment tool as well, to show people that the union is for them. Because I think, you know, in the past, people always saw unions as something like male heterosexual preserves and saying that it is gay-friendly and that it does have gay and lesbian friendly policies and this is what it is finding about for instance pension rights. That if the office of the prime minister won't come out with these revised regulations, that's something that we can and should be fighting for through not just being an autonomous union but also with the links to the Labour Party for pushing them to say like what are you going to do about that because it's, if the law has changed, why are they not changing the rules? **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Figure 9.1: A local authority network

Purpose of Network
- To provide a supportive and inclusive arena where LGB employees can meet to discuss key issues that affect the LGB community and individuals.
- To act as an advisory forum for the council on equality issues, policies and legislation.
- To positively promote the LGB community within the council and across the city.
- To provide a sign posting service to other LGB networks and organisations.
- The LGB network is open to all staff that identify as LGB and participation from all equality groups is actively encouraged for example Black and Minority Ethnic, women and disabled staff.

Figure 9.2: A local authority staff forum

"The purpose of the LGBT staff forum is to give LGBT staff a means of raising collective issues in relation to their employment and provide a means for the council to consult on employment policies and practices. This will help ensure that the council has the mechanisms in place to recruit and retain LGBT staff. Staff representatives will provide a link between management and the self-organised LGBT staff group."
The Objectives of the staff forum are as follows:
- To assist managers to identify and deal with workplace and employment issues to improve the recruitment and retention of LGBT staff.
- To help establish and promote best practice in the employment of LGBT staff.
- To act as a critical friend to inform managers decision-making.
- To investigate and comment upon LGBT employment issues referred to the Forum by the Corporate Equalities Steering Group (CESG) and Corporate Human Resources Group (CHRG)
- To help build capacity to respond to the findings of the LGBT staff consultation exercise and implement requirements of sexual orientation employment regulations.

Figure 9.3: A voluntary sector group

- Working towards ensuring that the organisation is an inclusive and equalities based organisation for the benefit of all service users, staff and volunteers.
- Working towards developing organisational excellence in supporting services users who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning.
- Supportive forum for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff.

"The group meets on a quarterly basis to provide an opportunity for all Lesbian and Gay workers, students and volunteers within the Region to discuss issues for the improvement of services for users and their families and working situations of staff. In addition there is an 'annual open forum'. This gives the opportunity to attend, and to discuss or ask for information and advice on any lesbian and gay work/personal issues/topics."

Figure 9.4: A private sector group

"(The group) is an employee resource group for gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender employees of the Company…..The group is respected and officially sanctioned by the Company.

(The group's aim) is simple: to ensure gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees individually, and as a group, are treated the same as all the other employees- no better no worse" . The groups' objectives are:
- To assist in attracting, utilising and retaining talented individuals.
- To protect Gay, Lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender employees from discrimination through advocating fair employment policies.
- To provide an opportunity for group members to network, communicate and provide mutual support.
- Create a working environment free of harassment and homophobic behaviour.
- To be a positive and visible group expressing LGB concerns and sensitivities in the workplace.
- To ensure a secure and equitable benefit programme for all employees, which recognises domestic partners and non-traditional families.
- To support diversity awareness training and education.
- To advocate and value diversity in the workforce.

The group highlights the benefits it hopes to bring to the company as a whole:

"The group's goals are mutually beneficial between its members and the company. By helping to maintain a safe, supportive work environment for LGBT people at the company, enhancing their loyalty and productivity, the group helps the company to achieve its goal of becoming the worlds premier automotive company."

Figure 9.5: A trade union group

UNISON recognises the importance of its LGBT members and its responsibility for paying particular attention to our needs: that LGBT rights are trade union issues. UNISON's commitment to equality and to tackling discrimination is written into the union's rules. [….]

Branch groups - There is a developing network of branch LGBT groups which meet to discuss local terms and conditions, build a support network for members facing problems at work, provide a forum for the debate of issues, assist members in gaining the confidence to get involved in other levels of the union. Branches join together and feed into:

Regional groups - Each of UNISON's 12 regions has a group which meets regularly. Regional groups are involved in a whole range of activities - taking up places on the regional structures to represent our members, organising training courses for activists, supporting the formation of branch groups, working closely with the other self-organised groups in UNISON. Regional groups each elect two representatives to the national level. […]

National organisation - LGBT self-organisation at a national level is co-ordinated by the national committee, made up of the regional representatives and representatives of black LGBT members and disabled LGBT members. […] The national LGBT committee is a recognised part of the union structure and works with other national committees, such as the national executive council and national negotiators, to ensure our rights are being taken up in every forum.

Working together in UNISON - The majority of UNISON's members are women and the union as a whole is committed to proportionality. This means women are represented at all levels of the union hierarchy in the same proportion as in the general membership.

Black and disabled LGBT members - Because lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are not a uniform group, and because our community is as prone to racism and discrimination against disabled people as the rest of society, black and disabled members meet as distinctive groups within our self-organised group. The national committee holds annual meetings for black and disabled LGBT members. These national network days, as they are called, elect members to the national committee and formulate proposals to go to the annual national LGBT conference. [….]

Key points

- Respondents identified a range of functions served by LGBT groups and networks. These included: the opportunity to socialise with other LGB colleagues; opportunities for networking about a variety of work related and other issues; the provision of support to LGB employees experiencing discrimination and harassment; influencing and monitoring policy; providing expert advice on practice in relation to sexuality; mentoring and training; campaigning on LGB issues and in the case of trade union LGBT groups negotiating with employers on LGB issues.
- These functions were not seen as mutually exclusive and respondents commonly identified multiple functions and priorities for LGBT groups.
- A common concern amongst respondents was that groups and networks were not sufficiently representative of particular groups of LGB people, particularly BME and disabled LGB people and those in manual occupations. Lesbians also highlighted the problem of groups being dominated by gay men and their concerns.
- There was also a common concern that LGBT groups were not sufficiently accessible to those not out at work.
- Trade union representatives were broadly supportive of employer initiatives to establish LGBT groups and accepted that employer groups and trade union groups could co-exist. However, there was a perception that LGBT groups organised by employers tended to be skewed towards male, professional and managerial workers and they pointed to their shortcomings in relation to campaigning and negotiating.
- Organisational LGBT group members were sometimes members of trade unions and sometimes not. Some among the latter group perceived potential tensions if the overlap became too close and expressed concerns about the possible withdrawal of senior management support.

Chapter 10: Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' awareness and perceptions of the impact of Sexual Orientation Regulations

10.1 Awareness of the Sexual Orientation Regulations

As Figure 10.1 shows the majority (73.2%) of LGB respondents in our sample reported that they were aware of the Sexual Orientation Regulations. However, (20.9%) said that they were not. A small number said they did not know about them (5.8%). The percentage of respondents who reported that they were aware of the Regulations was lower (67.7%) amongst private sector respondents, than public sector respondents (76.6%) and voluntary sector respondents (83.3%).

Figure 10.1: Are you aware of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003?
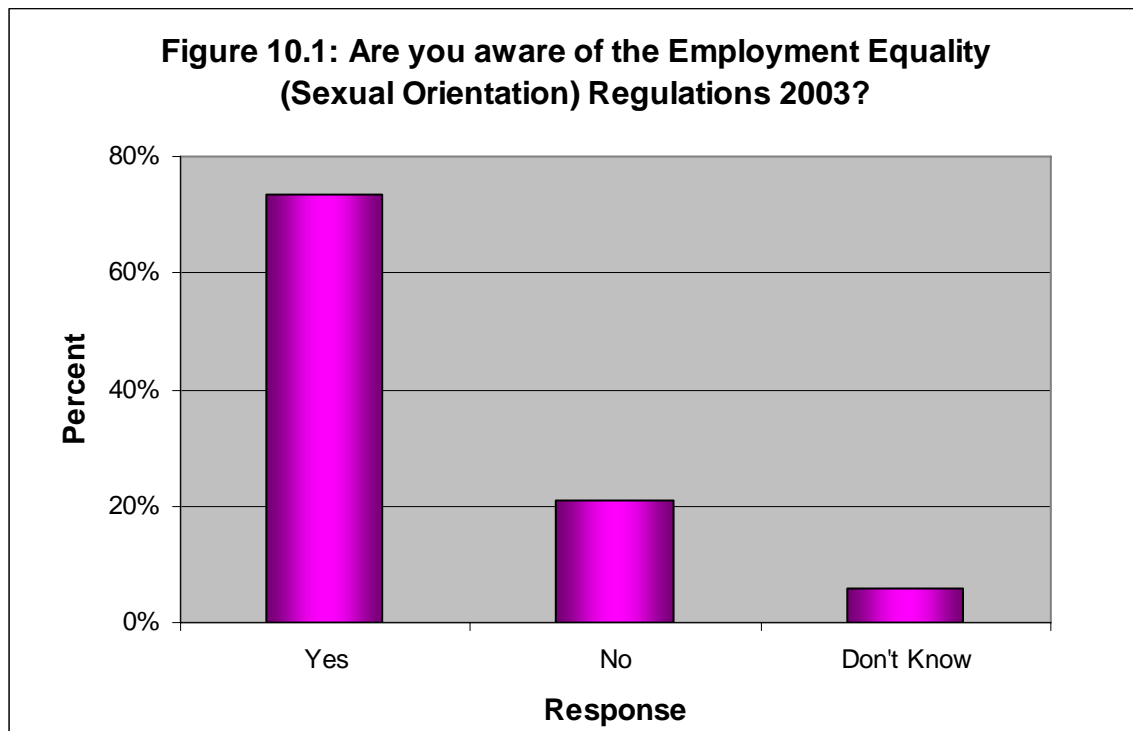
Those respondents who said that they knew of the Regulations described their awareness as emanating from a range of external and internal organisational sources, which are summarised in Table 10.1. Typically respondents' knowledge and awareness of the Regulations came mainly from external sources of information, particularly the LGBT media. The organisational LGBT group was the most frequently cited internal source of information. Although people said they were 'aware' of the regulations, many admitted their knowledge was limited.

When I am saying, when I ticked that I am aware of them, I don't know what they are like, I am literally just aware of them and I know that there are Regulations about. Just through the press really. Not through work. And when you see advertisements saying have you been discriminated against at work and are you aware that there is new

Regulations now and that's the only way that I have seen them. Particularly [the] gay press. Not through work, it's not been advertised through work at all. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

In fact some respondents expressed concern that they felt their employer or trade union could or should have done more to promote awareness.

I imagine if I made a bit of effort and searched on [the Council's] intranet site, I might find these things. But they certainly haven't been put in front of me and I know that I found out about them or I saw one of the leaflets or whatever about them from my work as a trustee rather than here and I would agree, I think [the organisation] should be doing more to promote various, or to raise awareness of those issues. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

Table 10.1: Regulations – source of awareness	
Internal sources	• LGB groups/networks • Trade union • Intranet • Training • Individual colleagues
External sources	• Media • Stonewall • Gay press • Internet • Central government email

10.2 Perceived impact of regulations on organisations

LGB respondents were asked whether they felt that the introduction of the Sexual Orientation Regulations had made a positive difference to the way their employer treated LGB workers. A summary of their responses is provided in Figure 10.2. Only a third (34%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Regulations had made a positive difference, though the proportion was higher amongst voluntary sector respondents (58.3%) than private (32.8%) or public (31.1%) sector respondents.

Overall there was a widespread view that the Regulations had made little or no impact on organisational policy and practice. However, this was commonly associated with a perception that the organisation was 'ahead of the game' and that policies had been in place prior to the regulations.

I think our policies generally are pretty much across the board so didn't need tweaking or changing to accommodate the new Sexual Orientation Discrimination Act. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

Figure 10.2: The regulations have made a positive difference to the way my employer treats LGB workers
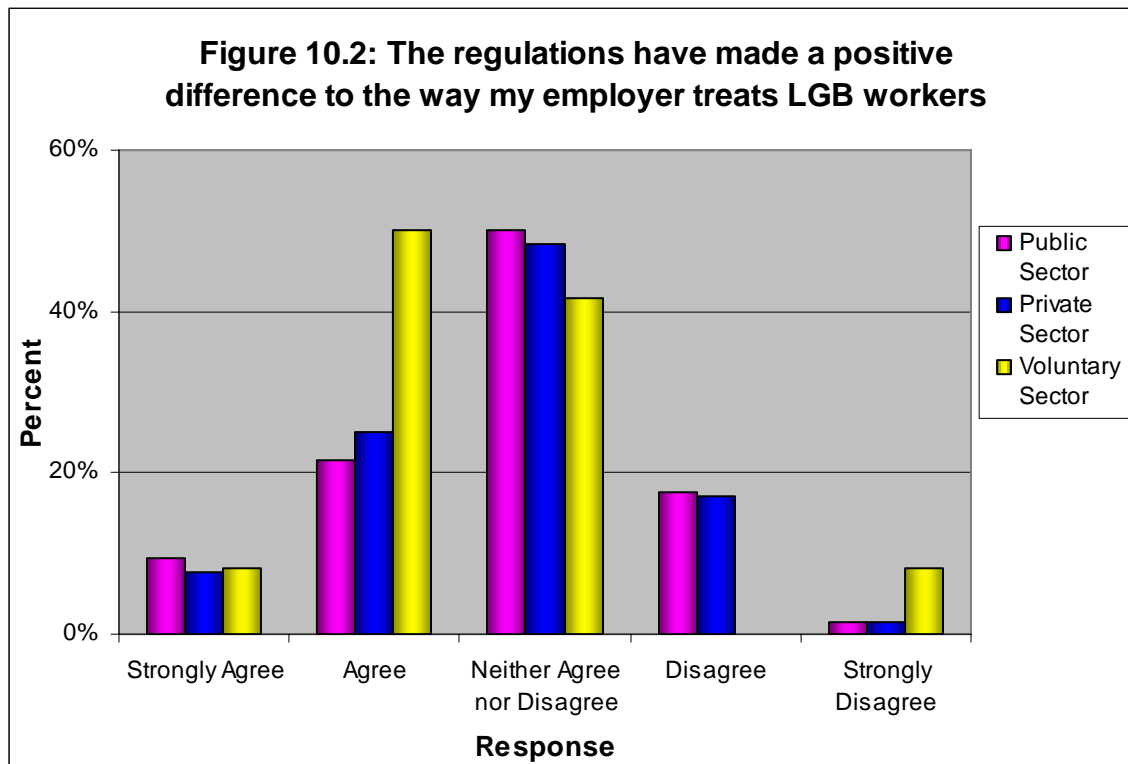
The perspective of some respondents was that the Regulations set out minimum requirements and thus provided little more than a safety net rather than the basis for good practice or a means of generating a shift in organisational culture.

What Regulations provide is almost like a safety net. And actually it's the lowest common denominator sort of stuff….the bottom line… Legislation is a last resort, isn't it. You go to …. tribunal or whatever around issues of discrimination because something awful has happened that you are challenging. …. My view would be is that they are kind of the lowest common denominator rather than what you would aspire to as good practice. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

Others felt that any action that had been taken in response to the Regulations had been merely to ensure legal compliance. Nevertheless some respondents did feel that the introduction of the Regulations had been significant either because it had 'cemented' existing practice or because it had 'kick started' a fresh approach to policy development and implementation:

I think it helps…It's more like cementing something into place rather than creating something new. **(Lesbian, Public sector, London)**

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However, other respondents were more positive about the impact of the Regulations within organisations both in terms of creating an impetus for new initiatives and providing a form of 'leverage' for LGB groups and networks:

I think it's buzzing… Last week I was at three conferences, you know that [were] LGB. I have never been on so many different things that are LGB relevant. I have just never seen it before and you know, it's really exciting to have it buzzing and I think the impact, it's as if we've been given the permission now to actually do something and to change things. And the floodgates have opened and everybody is like straight in there and it's as if we've always been in the background waiting for it to happen and all of a sudden these structures have actually formed themselves. Like the corporate group have organised the meetings last week. **(Lesbian, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

As a group I think the Regulations have been really helpful because it gives us some kind of leverage. One of the things, when I first joined the group, what I wanted to do was get them to look more strategically and look at the business plan and you know, prove to the Board and to the people that were funding the group why the funding was, you know, appropriate and why it should continue. You know, as well as the way the group could help the business plan, the Regulations have given us another like feather in our cap if you like to why the group should be funded and continued to be funded and why the group should be listened to and consulted and have our opinions taken seriously. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

Trade union representatives were broadly positive to the Regulations, in assisting them to ensure LGB issues were included on the bargaining agenda.

I think it helps when you get to national negotiation knowing something is backed by law. I think [the company] had already talked about equality of sexual orientation before it was law. Now you know, revisiting things like training courses, shouldn't there be more stuff on, going back and saying hold on there are still issues. **(Lesbian union representative, Private sector, London)**

However, national union representatives representing workers in the education, public and voluntary sectors were aware of shortcomings in the legislation.

We were very concerned about the exemption…on grounds of organisations with the purpose, employment for the purpose of religion and belief. I mean, which we took a test case…and we are quite clear that our judicial review application demonstrated that it's a very, very,

very narrow exemption. But we know perfectly well that that's… not what a lot of employers either think or do. And also, you know, a lot of employees believe the exemption is much wider than it really is. Or even, you know, how many people actually are aware of what the law says anyway. You know, most workers aren't aware of what the law says but in effect people who work in a religious institution or for a religious employer feel completely vulnerable. **(Trade union key informant, London)**

10.3   Perceived impact of the Regulations on individuals

Employees were, however, more positive about the impact of the Regulations on them as individuals. Nearly two thirds (64.7%) of the respondents agreed that the Regulations have made it more likely that they would take up a grievance about LGB discrimination if necessary. There was little variation amongst public (66.2%), private (62.5%) and voluntary (66.7%) respondents on this issue (Figure 10.3).

Respondents gave a range of reasons for taking this view. The introduction of the Regulations made people feel more confident to challenge the employer or take up a grievance with HR.

So I think it's a very nerve-wrecking thing, taking out a grievance in the first place and the Regulations themselves for me would make me feel more confident in taking out a grievance, knowing that I had not only the, not only a moral right on my side but a piece of legislation to back that up as well. **(Gay man, Voluntary sector, London)**

Well it's just knowing you've got a right to really…. Particularly if it's regulations, it's based on the law, you've got the unions, you've the legal fees, the union will take up your grievance and support you in that and obviously I am a big believer in the union because of things like that. I mean, just generally if any issues in the workplace you've got the union. So the Regulations are very clear so there is no argument with it. It says it in black and white, you can't do that…So there is just a clarification there… it is very clear that this shouldn't be happening and you experience it, it reassures you and gives you the confidence that you know you are right and you know that you've been discriminated against or whatever and you can take it forward **(Gay man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Figure 10.3: The regulations make it more likely that I would take up a grievance about LGB discrimination
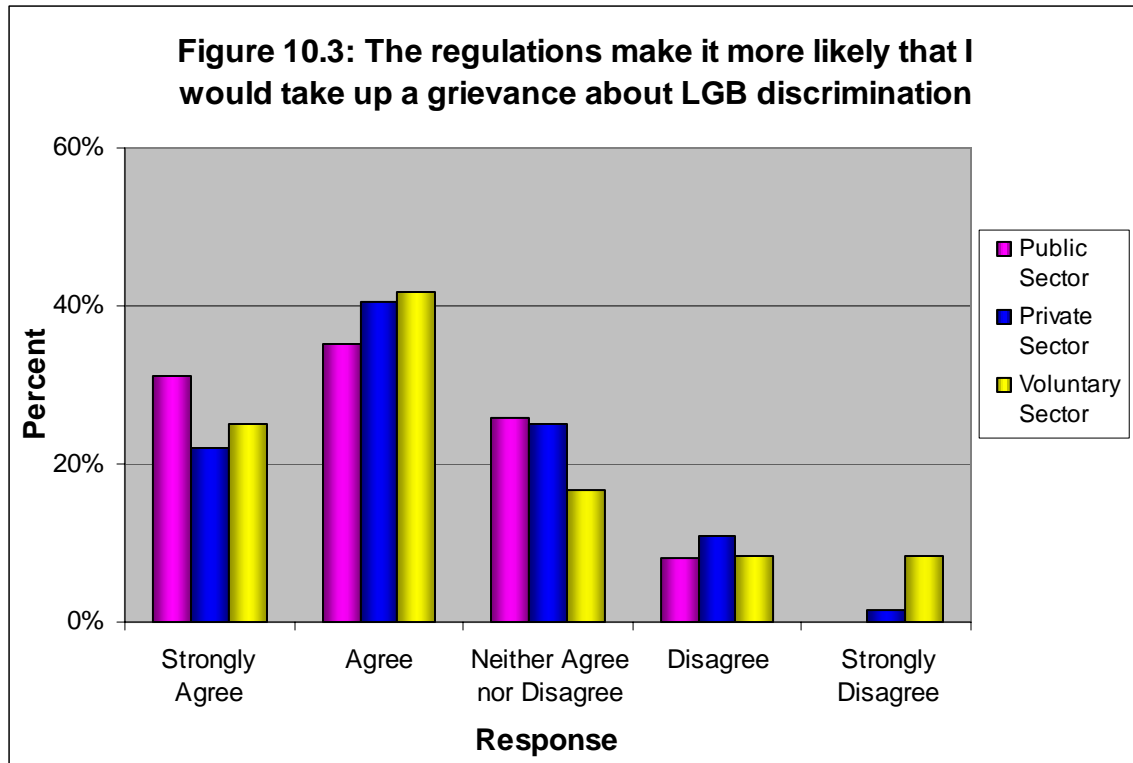
In effect they provided a 'stick to beat' the employer with in a last resort situation because they provided a 'tangible', 'measurable' and more 'defined' framework within which to pursue a complaint. Another related view was that they provided the basis for a more 'consistent' approach to the way discrimination against LGB workers would be dealt with.

> I went to HR but that was about it. I felt belittled by my team for having done so. Now I think I feel a bit more defined perhaps. A bit more stronger person in myself. That I would, I wouldn't perhaps let fear of retribution scare me now. (**Lesbian, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

It was suggested that the Regulations meant that discrimination which had previously gone unchallenged would be tackled, though at the margins some concern was expressed that they may enable unnecessary claims to be pursued.

Others felt less strongly that the Regulations would make a difference to what course of action they might take. For example some expressed a more neutral view that such legislation was 'never unhelpful', whilst others explained that they would make no difference either because they would have taken a stand anyway or because the Regulations did not enhance the protection provided by employer policies that were already in place.

> They don't make a difference to me, because if I had a grievance I would go to my line manager and say 'I've got a problem' and do you

know, I would have done that before and I would do that now. **(Gay man, Private sector, London)**

At a more general level respondents welcomed the Regulations because they provided legal recognition which had hitherto not existed and afforded lesbian, gay and bisexual people the same protection as other groups thus creating a form of parity:

> But it's very comforting to know that finally it's sort of recognised, sort of brought on a par with gender, or race, or ability. That, you know, that right is now there. And I think that gives one a certain amount of confidence to be out in the workplace without fear of the consequences. **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire)**

However, the extent to which they were welcomed varied. At one end of the spectrum they were greeted with considerable enthusiasm because they provided formality and visibility.

> It's absolutely fantastic because I am legal, I am allowed to be employed and it means that I am now in a position where if somebody persecutes me because I am gay, they can't get away with it anymore. You know, because there is an actual formal structure where you know, that just can't happen anymore. And it also means that it's being talked about which makes it more safe for me because it's not hidden. **(Lesbian, Public Sector, Yorkshire)**

A more cautious point of view was that the Regulations would not of themselves create change, but that they did provide a 'statement of intent', which could be taken before an employment tribunal and in combination with other legislation some confidence that things were moving in the right direction.

Others however adopted more sceptical and critical standpoints. For example, it was suggested that the Regulations probably didn't go far enough because the position of lesbian, gay and bisexual people tended to lag behind that of other groups. Similarly, it was argued that the legislation merely made things easier but didn't create equality. And the extent of progress was questioned:

> It just makes things easier, you know, it doesn't make things equal, it just makes things easier and that's it really. And again it's all about 'are we addressing the fundamentals?'. So yeah, it's all good, it's a step in the right direction but for Christ sake, have we moved on that much? Have we moved on as far as what it could have done? **(Gay man, Private sector, Yorkshire**)

Respondents also differed in their perspective about how far the Regulations would bring about a change in attitudes. On the one hand it was suggested that they could have an impact on discriminatory behaviour provided people were made fully aware of the basis of the Regulations. On the other it was suggested that ignorance may prevail and that people might still discriminate whilst taking care to avoid prosecution.

> I think people would think twice about being blatantly homophobic because there is a lot more protection for the worker now, but that protection will only work if people have an awareness, a clear awareness about what is acceptable and what's not. **(Gay man, Public sector, London)**

> There is still ignorance in the minds of people that might just think it's just another law, alright, I will not call them this, I will not do this You know, there is a lot of ignorance that is embedded. So maybe in an ideal world everyone's minds get changed. **(Bisexual man, Public sector, Yorkshire)**

Key points

- In general LGB respondents (73.2% of the sample) were aware but not necessarily knowledgeable about the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations. However, this was not usually as a result of communication from the employer.
- Internal sources of information about the Regulations cited by respondents that involved the employer were the use of the intranet; training and LGBT groups and networks. Other internal sources of information included trade union groups and publicity and interaction with individual colleagues.
- External sources of information about the Regulations cited by respondents included the media, the gay press, Stonewall, the internet and central government emails/websites.
- Overall there was a widespread perception amongst respondents that the Regulations had made little or no impact on organisational policy and practice. This was commonly associated with a perception that organisations were 'ahead of the game' and that policies had been in place prior to the introduction of the Regulations.
- There was a less commonly expressed view amongst respondents that the Regulations had made a positive impact both in terms of creating the impetus for new initiatives and providing a form of 'leverage' for LGBT groups and networks.
- Trade union representatives broadly welcomed the Regulations and discussed the way in which they had assisted them in bargaining for LGB members. However national trade union representatives highlighted the shortcomings of the legislation particularly the religion and belief exemptions.
- However, the perceived impact of the Regulations on respondents as individual employees was more positive. Typically respondents indicated that they would be more likely to take a grievance if a problem arose since the introduction of the Regulations. A range of reasons were given for this including greater confidence to challenge employers and the existence of a more defined framework in which to pursue a complaint.
- Whilst some respondents were more agnostic, cautious and even sceptical about the benefits of the Regulations, in general they welcomed them because they provided hitherto non-existent legal recognition and parity with other groups.
- Respondents also offered different perspectives about the extent to which the Regulations would bring about a change in attitudes to LGB employees

Chapter 11: Implications for policy and practice

11.1 Overview

This research study has produced an extensive range of findings about the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers which have been summarised throughout this report. The purpose of this chapter is not to restate those findings or to make specific recommendations.

One of the over arching themes to emerge from the study is the diversity of experience both within and between organisations. This diversity of experience cuts across sectors and regions. It would therefore not be appropriate or possible to make detailed recommendations that would be relevant to all organisations. It is important to state however that these were 'good practice' organisations with a history, albeit in some cases recent, of developing policy and practice in this area.

How organisations develop policy and practice in this area will depend on a range of factors including:

- Nature of business
- Size, geographical spread and location
- Interface with community, service users and customers
- Historical approach to equality and diversity
- Employee consultation and communication mechanisms

However, it is possible to draw from the findings of this study, a broad range of policy and practice objectives, which are applicable across all organisations. These objectives can underpin the development of inclusion within organisations and the creation of inclusive workplaces and experiences for lesbian, gay and bisexual workers. They are not mutually exclusive but inter-dependent. While they will have resource implications it is important not to prioritise between them but to develop a coherent framework.

11.2 Policy and practice objectives

This research suggests that organisations wishing to create an inclusive environment for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees should adopt a range of policy and practice objectives.

- **Acknowledge and validate diverse sexualities** – Research evidence from this study reveals the complexity and range of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' experiences and in relation to sexual identity within the workplace, the wider organisation and the multiplicity of work contexts and experiences which they encounter. It cannot be assumed that all lesbian, gay and bisexual workers want to 'come out' about their sexuality in the same way or

to the same extent. However, it is clear that where lesbian, gay and bisexual people are able to make choices which are based on personal preference rather than pressure there are tangible benefits for them and the organisation. The challenge for organisations is therefore to create an organisational culture which enables individual ownership of sexual identity whilst at the same time places the responsibility for acknowledging and validating diverse sexualities on everyone in the workforce.

- **Take a proactive approach to tackling discrimination** – Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers in this study consistently discussed experiences and raised issues, which both explicitly and implicitly illustrated the need for a proactive approach to tackling discrimination. Organisations need to develop a culture of enforcement that does not place the onus for recognising and dealing with discrimination and harassment solely on lesbian, gay and bisexual workers themselves. Systems and procedures must combine rigour with flexibility and guarantee confidentiality and anonymity as far as is practical.

- **Create an inclusive managerial culture** – The study demonstrates the need for managers at all levels to take responsibility for creating inclusion for lesbian, gay and bisexual workers. Senior management commitment has a vital role to play and will be enhanced by the presence of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in leadership roles. But on a day-to-day level it is those with line management and supervisory responsibility who need to be given the tools and incentives to develop and maintain inclusion within the workplace.

- **Consult with LGB employees about policy development** – The needs, concerns and priorities of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers vary within organisations. Implementing a robust top down approach needs to be combined with securing feedback and input from the bottom up. Policy development should be rooted in the everyday experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers.

- **Conduct equality audits and reviews** – The research showed that even within 'good practice' organisations, there are extensive and wide ranging barriers to policy implementation and considerable inconsistencies of approach and experience. Evidence from this study suggests that regular and detailed audits and reviews of policy and practice that incorporate the perspectives of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers may provide a way of highlighting such barriers and the possible means of overcoming them.

- **Find new ways of developing LGB groups and networks** – The research demonstrated the value of LGB groups and networks to lesbian, gay and bisexual workers. However it also illustrated that they create different expectations and meet diverse needs and that creating structures which are representative and relevant is a challenge. Organisations and trade unions

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need to explore the most appropriate way of developing and utilising groups and networks which take account of organisational and workplace context, communication and internet resources and the views and perspectives of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers themselves.

- **Ensure policy is promoted to multiple audiences** – The visibility of policy was key to LGB respondents in this study. It is vital for organisations to promote policy through training, publicity and information. The promotion of policy needs to acknowledge the existence of multiple audiences with different needs and responsibilities. For too long organisations have treated the LGB area as 'sensitive' and thus been silent on equality and diversity initiatives in the area.

- **Recognise the importance of community outreach and customer focus** – The relationship of organisations to lesbian, gay and bisexual people outside the organisation sends a powerful signal to lesbian, gay and bisexual workers within the organisation. Organisations need to take steps to ensure that they have a coherent internal and external focus and approach to the inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

- **Embed inclusion within policy and performance management** – A central finding of this research is the lack of consistency of policy within organisations and the way in which this is manifest in lesbian, gay and bisexual workers' experiences. Embedding inclusive practice within all policy implementation through equality proofing and performance indicators will expose inconsistencies and gaps in implementation.

- **Address the heterogeneity of the LGB population** – Both the conduct of this study and its findings underline the heterogeneity of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, age, occupation, desire to be out at work etc. Organisations need to develop policies, procedures and structures that recognise this if they wish to be inclusive and representative.

- **Monitor and evaluate policy** - Creating and maintaining a continuous bank of evidence about practice within organisations has a crucial role to play in enhancing the efficacy of policy delivery. Such evidence must include a range of perspectives including those of lesbian, gay and bisexual workers.

Appendix 1: HE ESF LGB Advisory Board

Name	Position	Organisation
Dr Mark Bell	Reader, Faculty of Law	University of Leicester
Dennis Carney	Chair, BGMAG Black Gay Men's worker, Pace	PACE & Black Gay Men's Advisory Group
Katherine Cowan	Policy & Information Officer	Stonewall
David Eales	Convenor, Yorkshire & Humberside TUC LGBT Forum	YorkshireTUC
Ali Harris	Programme Manager, Equality and Diversity	Citizen's Advice Bureau
Suhraiya Jivraj	Project Co-ordinator	Safra Project Until Summer 2005
Dr Surya Munro	Senior Research Fellow, Faculty of Business & Law	Leeds Metropolitan University
Julie Newman	Liaison with Disability Communities	Regard
Sarah Podro	Employment Relations Analyst, Strategy Unit	ACAS
Peter Purton	LGBT & Disability Rights Officer	TUC
Khi Rafe	Vice Chair, BLUK & member of UNISON Black LGBT Caucus	Black Lesbian UK (BLUK) & UNISON
Ellen Reynolds	Principal Diversity Adviser, DIALOG	Improvement & Development Agency (IDEA)
Carola Towle	Head of Membership Participation	UNISON

Appendix 2: National key informant interview list

Name	Position	Organisation
Bradford ABC spokesperson	Bradford Asian and Black Community LGB group	Bradford ABC
Joshua Bradley	Operations Manager, Youth Service	Terence Higgins Trust
Stewart Brown	Gay and Lesbian NEC Member and Gay and Lesbian Committee	FBU
Dennis Carney	Chair, BGMAG Black Gay Men's worker, PACE	PACE & Black Gay Men's Advisory Group
David Eales	Convenor, Yorkshire & Humberside TUC LGBT Forum	Yorkshire TUC
Tony Fenwick	National contact	Schools Out
Denis Fernando	Co-ordinator	Lesbian and Gay Coalition against Racism (LAGCAR)
Tim Foskett	Gay/Bi men's group work programme co-ordinator, PACE	PACE
Stephen Frost	Manager of the Diversity Champions Programme	Stonewall
Ali Harris	Programme Manager, Equality and Diversity	Citizen's Advice Bureau
DTI spokesperson	Selected Employment Rights Branch, Employment Relations Directorate.	DTI
Ibrahim Ismail	NPL's Sexual Health Coordinator for South Asian & Muslim Men	NAZ
Tim Lucas	Chair of the NUT LGBT Working Party	NUT
Bev Miller	Member Black LGBT Caucus & UNISON Y&H	UNISON
Peter Purton	LGBT & Disability Rights Officer	TUC
Khi Rafe	Vice Chair, BLUK & member of UNISON Black LGBT Caucus	Black Lesbian UK (BLUK) & UNISON
Brenda Roper	Policy Adviser	Advisory & Conciliation Service (ACAS)
Ellen Reynolds	Principal Diversity Adviser, DIALOG	Local Government Employers Organisation
Sue Sanders	Co-Chair	Schools Out
Parminder Sekhon	Client Support Services Manager & KISS Asian Women's Group	NAZ
Karen Shook	Joint Female Co-Chair	Regard
Carola Towle	Head of Membership Participation	UNISON
Dianah Worman	Equality & Diversity Adviser	CIPD