



LGBT+ Culture in Higher Education

Executive Summary

September 2022



UNIVERSITY OF
GREENWICH
London | Kent



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Executive Summary

This is an executive summary of the [full report](#), which we recommend the reader refers to for a fuller understanding of the findings, inclusive of a discussion.

Background and aims

Recent data confirms that, notwithstanding developments in legal and social rights, LGBT+ discrimination and oppression continues across the tertiary education sector. These findings signpost the need to explore the lived experience of those affected. Increasingly neo-liberal approaches taken by tertiary institutions prioritise marketisation and standardisation (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Kandiko, 2010). In such environments, approaches to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are often understood as ‘tick-box’ exercises. Thereby, presenting data that simultaneously offers measurability whilst obscuring the identities of the individuals being measured; relying on systems defined by generalised needs and homogenised categorisation. Almost 50% of LGBT+ staff in Higher Education report facing direct discrimination (Stonewall, 2018; 2021) – largely experienced as derogatory jokes, misgendering and stereotyping (MCKinsey, 2020). Further, 3/4 of LGBT+ staff have considered leaving the sector, citing mental health issues and burnout (University and College Union, 2021). In contrast, supportive environments lead to increased performance and enhanced job satisfaction (Pichler et al., 2018; Webster et al., 2018).

In September 2021, research commissioned by the University of Greenwich commenced, to better understand the lived experiences of its LGBT+ staff and allies. This emancipatory case study closely aligns with strategic priorities relating to inclusivity and culture. The data gathered democratises an often-homogenised acronym LGBT+, going further to shed light on the unique and often intersected identities and experiences of those self-identifying with the identities contained therein. Drawing on the findings above, and further aligned with increasing demands for enhanced employer duty of care, this study sought to present findings and deliver recommendations to support the development of inclusive spaces where LGBT+ staff can achieve their full potential. In congruence, recognition of examples of good practice and celebrating key successes, has provided an opportunity to look at the impact of related interventions. With the generalisations the acronym LGBT+ brings, it presents barriers to understanding the full spectrum and fluidity by which gender and sexuality are lived. Gender and sexuality are hereby identified as different and thus both were explored independently and connectedly throughout this case study.

This case study paid particular attention to:

1. LGBT+ culture and inclusion
 - a. Presenting lived experience, representative of the specific, unique and intersectional identities present.

- b. Enhance understanding of sexuality and gender expressions present at the university.
 - c. How is LGBT+ discrimination experienced at the university?
 - d. How secure and supported do LGBT+ feel at work?
2. The impact of institutional policies on LGBT+ staff experience
 - a. Exploring how university documents negotiate and support LGBT+ experience.
 - b. Exploring homogenisation within university documents.
 - c. How is structural discrimination experienced at the university?
3. Allyship
 - a. What is expected of LGBT+ allies and what qualities constitute an ally?
 - b. How is allyship defined?
 - c. How is allyship supported and developed?

Readers are advised that the experiences of those here referenced vary greatly on an individual basis, with many aspects of interconnected identity not considered nor reflected on further. This means that individuals that may share an LGBT+ identity characteristic can have very different intersecting characteristics and, person to person, hold different perspectives and report very different experiences.

Methodology

This seven-phase emancipatory case study progressed between September 2021 and August 2022. This study was informed and co-produced with a steering group consisting of 23 university staff. Data was harvested throughout a triangulation of mixed methods including Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA), a self-administered survey, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. NVivo, SPSS and STaTaSE were used for the organisation, management and analysis of the data. The study received ethical approval by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC/Pentaris – 21.1.6.16).

7 Phases of Case Study Development		
Phase 1	09/21-10/21	Review of knowledge surrounding: (1) LGBT+ experience at work, (2) homogenous approaches to LGBT+ identities and intersectionality, (3) allyship and bystanders.
Phase 2	10/21-02/22	Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA)
Phase 3	10/21-03/22	Survey (all staff)
Phase 4	12/21-03/22	In-depth interviews (self-identified LGBT+ and allied staff)
Phase 5	02/22-05/22	Focus groups (self-identified LGBT+ and allied staff)
Phase 6	05/22-07/22	Data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation
Phase 7	07/22-08/22	Research report, write up

QDA

198 staff facing university documents were vetted. A sample of 41 were selected for analysis. These documents were identified as impacting or negotiating the experience of LGBT+ members of staff.

This sample included:

- Guidance documents (n=11)
- Information sheets (n=1)
- Policy documents (n=14)
- Regulations (n=4)
- Reports (n=6)
- Statements (n=1)
- Strategies (n=4)

A total of 447 pages were analysed. Of the 41 documents considered, 7 referenced the key terms LGBT, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans. A timeline of development was observed across the documents, commencing with a single report published during 2009 and culminating in the publication of 13 related documents throughout 2021. Variations of language use were observed and grouped in relation to document dimensionality and authorship. Scarce reference to intersectionality and non-binary identities were identified, signposting a requirement for further development.

5 themes were generated from the QDA:

1. An action plan for inclusion
2. Empowerment
3. Inclusivity
4. Inequalities
5. Raising awareness

Key findings

- Documents related to LGBT+ identities promote awareness of the issues faced.
- Action plans do not address approaches to empowerment.
- Unconscious bias and inequalities relate to language used.
- Documents promoting empowerment do not recognise inequalities.
- 15/41 feature themes of inclusion, only 3/41 speak to staff empowerment.
- 15/41 address inclusivity, only 5/41 recognise inequalities.

The survey

213 responses were considered in the analysis. Responses with missing data were excluded. Of the respondents, 40% identified as an LGBT+ ally, 37% as LGBT+, and the remaining 23% of the sample identified as neither.

Predominant participant characteristics:

- 35% atheist
- 30% disabled
- 75% full-time
- 58% heterosexual
- 83% white
- 56% woman

Key findings

- ⇒ People's identity (sexuality) is associated with the motivation to be open at work ($X^2=17.90$, $p=.02$) and with co-workers ($X^2=15.50$, $p<.05$).
- ⇒ Feeling valued at work was positively correlated with visibility of role models ($X^2=16.74$, $p<.05$).
- ⇒ People's identity impacts on their decision to report discrimination ($X^2=16.44$, $p<.05$).
- ⇒ Older staff members are more likely to have provided direct personal allyship to a LGBT+ member of staff ($X^2[20, 85]=31.38$, $p<.05$).
- ⇒ Being confident to be an LGBT+ ally is impacted by race ($X^2[15, 85]=26.38$, $p<.05$).
- ⇒ Finding allyship a rewarding experience is dependent on staff's progression at work ($X^2[15, 85]=28.46$, $p<.05$).
- ⇒ Microaggressions (69% of LGBT+ staff) and indirect discrimination (67% of LGBT+ staff) are the two most reported types of discrimination experienced.
- ⇒ LGBT+ staff at large feel safe to be open at work.
- ⇒ LGBT+ staff report that discrimination on the grounds of sexuality exists at the University.
- ⇒ Line managers who are open with those they manage feel their identity has a positive impact on their development.
- ⇒ Those feeling comfortable voicing their views, also know who to approach when deciding to report discrimination.
- ⇒ Visibility and role models increase the likelihood of staff reporting discrimination.
- ⇒ Being open at work and feeling respected are correlated with the likelihood of reporting discrimination and recognising institutional policy that supports LGBT+ staff.
- ⇒ LGBT+ allies do not feel confident that the university provides adequate training and resources to support allyship.

Interviews and focus group discussions

Interviews ($n=40$) and focus groups ($n=6$, 35 participants) were progressed with self-identified LGBT+ and allied staff. An exploratory approach was adopted investigating how participants' experiences regarding LGBT+ identities are affected by other factors when joining the University and during their employment. Data resulting from the interviews and focus group

discussions presented as topical themes. These themes include: *Lived Experience*; *Diversity and Inclusion*; *Responding to Discrimination*; *Allyship*; *What Next*.

Key findings

Lived experience

Over 55% of the participants have felt very welcome when joining the university and found their line manager to be supportive. Yet, such experience was dependent on the department or area of work in the University, recognising some areas are more welcoming than others. Further, the study found that staff who joined the University in the last two years had a much more positive experience than their counterparts who have been a member of staff for over ten years, for example. The data emphasised that staff that have been longer with the University may still be impacted by past grievances, including misgendering, racism and homophobia, which directly affect their perception and experience in the present.

The profiling of the University as an LGBT+ inclusive environment influenced LGBT+ identified staff to apply for employment, but was a neutral factor for others. Overall, staff experiences with inductions were not altogether positive. Largely it was felt that introductory sessions would benefit from more signposting regarding diversity and inclusivity, as well as the staff communities and networks available.

94% of self-identified LGBT+ staff expressed growing trust in university leadership over the past two years. However, there was overall recognition that not all senior leaders engage well with EDI matters, with some elements considered performative. In addition to this, line management is experienced in six distinct ways:

1. Bystanding
2. Inattentive
3. Reactional
4. Supportive
5. Toxicity
6. Unequipped

Participants consider the environment at the University to be inclusive, but not consistently. Participant experience is influenced by their area of employment, and various experiences are recorded. With negative feelings linked to experiences of microaggressions or direct discrimination, as well as positive experiences, or positive discrimination. 76% of the sample consider their teams to be diverse, although not necessarily relating to LGBT+ identities. Data shows that LGBT+ staff do not feel represented across the University and in relation to intersected identities, especially in senior leadership positions. Whereas, a sense of nurturing a 'white ceiling' was expressed.

The overall experience of LGBT+ staff is mixed regarding feelings of supportiveness. Visibility is emphasised as a key factor predicting positive experiences, feeling supported and safe. Adding, an active LGBT+ Staff Community, active allies, and peer support are the three main factors creating a positive experience for LGBT+ Staff. On the other hand, some data

presented concerns with student understanding surrounding LGBT+ identities. According to the participants of this study, students are often observed acting out prejudice.

81% of the study participants, who identify as LGBT+, shared experiences of direct discrimination or witnessing discrimination, with individuals identifying as gay men, bisexual or demisexual in the leading positions.

Lastly, the study revealed what the impact of discrimination is on individuals. Such impact refers to anger, anxiety, feelings of disrespect, feelings of distress, feelings of exclusion and isolation, and feelings of dysphoria. Noting that staff who are newer to the University – e.g., under six months – were unlikely to have experienced or witnessed discrimination.

Barriers to inclusivity

In addition to the key findings above, data showed seven distinct areas that LGBT+ staff and allies recognise as barriers to creating inclusive environments at the university. Those are as follows:

1. Basic training with limited exemplifications of intersectionality.
2. Lack of engagement from senior leaders across all areas of the university.
3. Unequal opportunities for staff.
4. The tendency to homogenise LGBT+ identities and blur boundaries between sex and gender.
5. Lack of safe spaces for those with intersected identities.
6. Unequal promotion and support of identities.
7. Not enough visibility of staff communities and networks.

Responding to discrimination

Data reveals that staff prefer to follow an informal approach when responding to discrimination and avoid formal procedures, while the recognised Accident Management System (AMS) is seen as a problematic platform that suggests discrimination to be an ‘accident’. Further, staff increasingly feel more comfortable speaking up and raising concerns, whether this is about peers or line managers. Yet, power dynamics and circumstances influence the decision to challenge discrimination; staff recognised that they would feel uncomfortable raising concerns about a senior member’s behaviour or language, for example.

Allyship

The data revealed that LGBT+ staff and those identifying as LGBT+ allies are moderately confident that University staff are allies but with certain limitations. Further, data suggests that those acting as allies may not always attribute their action to allyship per se but rather act on principal. Generally, data questions the intent behind allyship; participants were unsure whether allyship related activities are driven performatively by policy or by personally held principles or values.

The general consensus is that allyship is an ever-evolving identity, which needs to lead to active participation as an ally, as opposed to passive. Data led to the development of a spectrum of allyship spanning from active-ally with high engagement to passive-ally with low engagement. The degree of engagement in the spectrum refers to initiative to develop further knowledge and understanding about issues related to LGBT+ and become an 'accomplice to the cause'. Moreover, elements of data revealed that some LGBT+ staff may consider allyship as an indicator for victimisation, inferring that one is unable to self-advocate and needs another person to do it for them.

The study revealed 11 characteristics understood to be the qualities of a good ally, including:

1. Accountability
2. Upstanding
3. Supportive
4. Advocate
5. Listening
6. Willingness to learn
7. Non-judgmental
8. Educating others
9. Understanding
10. Caring
11. Creating safe spaces

These qualities overlap and compound the profiling of a good ally from the perspectives of LGBT+ self-identified staff and active LGBT+ allies.

Next steps

The data also shows 10 recognised areas which need improvement in order to promote a safer and more inclusive environment for LGBT+ staff. These areas are:

1. Creating safe spaces
2. Diversifying forms (e.g. personal details)
3. Diversifying teaching
4. Early on intervention
5. Gender Neutral Toilets (GNT)
6. Language
7. Open conversations
8. Policy reviews
9. Role models
10. Visibility

Recommendations

To mitigate challenges, risks and weaker areas that this report identifies, we are making the following recommendations.

University documents

Recommendation 1: Re-examine what language is used in university documents, as well as how this language is used, in order to provide a more inclusive framework for practice at university level (e.g., avoid homogenisations; avoid victimisations).

Recommendation 2: Make university documents more accessible to all staff regardless of seniority or pathway of employment.

Recommendation 3: Re-consider the guidance for managers when supporting LGBT+ staff. Create a working group of LGBT+ staff to produce a set of ways in which line managers can best and more effectively support LGBT+ staff at the university.

Recommendation 4: Where an action plan for inclusivity is communicated in university documents, a guidance that details how this can materialise to be provided.

Recommendation 5: Negotiate the concept of empowerment in university documents, especially guidance about supporting LGBT+ staff. This will help those supporting others to better understand how to approach this area, and staff to meet their full potential.

Recommendation 6: Develop further communication channels to ensure staff remain aware of university policies affecting LGBT+ experience. This will also increase the likelihood of staff to report discrimination.

Recommendation 7: Accumulate policies and practices about parenting making them more inclusive to the challenges and experiences of LGBT+ parents.

Recommendation 8: Diversify university forms collecting data (e.g., HR) with further options in the spectrum of LGBT+ identities or provide space for individuals to type in their preferred identity.

Language

Recommendation 9: Develop an evolving glossary of language to be used as a reference point.

Recommendation 10: Avoid language that tends to homogenise individuals. Make use of terms like ‘sexually diverse’ and ‘gender diverse’ individuals.

Recommendation 11: Develop language that is concerned with intersected identities regardless of degree of underrepresentation – avoiding hierarchy of oppression or discrimination or identity.

Visibility

Recommendation 12: Enable staff and university leaders to champion sexually and gender diverse populations with minor acts (e.g., wearing LGBT+ lanyards) and more visible role models.

Recommendation 13: Enable staff to make use of pronouns where this is a choice.

Recommendation 14: Ensure diversity of role models at the university to increase representation.

Recommendation 15: Increase representation of LGBT+ identities at the intersection with underrepresented racial and ethnic identities.

Learning and teaching

Recommendation 16: Support staff to develop a more inclusive curriculum which will help tackle incidents of microaggressions and discrimination altogether when led by students. Develop discussion groups among academics across Faculties and Schools that will help share good practice.

Recommendation 17: Diversify teaching material and delivery methods to create more inclusive environments.

Continuous development

Recommendation 18: Initiate a biannual measurement of staff experience of the University as an inclusive and welcoming environment, which will help monitor progress.

Recommendation 19: Develop mentoring scheme to support those who are lacking the confidence to challenge discrimination when witnessed or experienced.

Recommendation 20: Develop a reporting system on the university app or develop a new app focusing on these matters.

Recommendation 21: Develop further communication channels to ensure staff remain aware of how and when to report discrimination, isolation, bullying, harassment and/or discrimination.

Recommendation 22: Equip university staff with the skills and knowledge to identify and report discrimination. Develop training inclusive of university procedures.

Recommendation 23: Develop separate strategies (restorative justice) that will address grievance related issues regarding LGBT+ experiences in the last twenty years.

Recommendation 24: Create safe spaces wherein individuals can, with confidence, share thoughts (not always correct) which they are open to explore.

Recommendation 25: Develop safe spaces where conversations about faith, religion and non-religion can be had, and in relation to LGBT+ identities.

Recommendation 26: Continue to support the LGBT+ Staff Community and its activities in order to ensure a sustainably positive impact on the LGBT+ experience.

Recommendation 27: Develop synergies with the GSU to devise methods by which students can become more aware and conscious of LGBT+ identities and experiences in order to tackle student-led discrimination in the classroom and on campus.

Recommendation 28: The University to re-emphasise its zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and oppression, which extends to both staff and students, as well as partners inside and outside the UK.

Recommendation 29: Raise awareness of positive discrimination to tackle risks of feelings of exclusion.

Recommendation 30: Avoid positive discrimination in recruitment and selection practices.

Induction

Recommendation 31: Promote allyship as a rewarding experience – include the benefits of allyship in the induction of new staff.

Recommendation 32: Develop a more stable induction experience for university staff, including an information pack of all the resources pertinent to EDI. Give staff the opportunity to attend staff networks/communities' meetings and explore interests.

Training

Recommendation 33: Develop specialised training on microaggressions to raise further (self and institutional) awareness to tackle such issues.¹⁶⁶

Recommendation 34: Put more robust allyship training in place, drawing on active vs passive allyship and the qualities of a 'good ally'.

Recommendation 35: Line managers to be trained to become more resourceful in relation to mental health support services given the impact of discrimination on LGBT+ identified staff.

Profiling

Recommendation 36: Promote inclusivity to public facing material further as it is a marketing factor when recruiting individuals who abide by similar or same values.

Line management and senior leadership

Recommendation 37: University staff to assess – during appraisal cycles – their line manager regarding diversity and inclusion.

Recommendation 38: Senior leadership to engage with LGBT+ events more and across campuses. Presence to be increased both physically and via internal comms, articles, etc.

Recommendation 39: Develop a new model of line management that is underpinned by the principles of responsibility, commitment, good relations, and self-motivation (theory Y) in order to improve lived experiences of LGBT+ staff. This is a participative management style that promotes a collaborative environment and moves away from a micromanagement approach that is more prominent in a top-down approach that tends to accentuate tick-box exercises.

Recommendation 40: Develop robust line management training that adequately equips those managing others with the appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding of sexually and gender diverse identities.

Recommendation 41: Continue to work closely with staff networks and communities to tackle structural discrimination.

Inclusive environment

Recommendation 42: To overcome barriers to becoming more inclusive:

- ⇒ Enrich training on diversity and inclusivity
- ⇒ Senior leadership to become more engaging and visible on matters of LGBT+
- ⇒ Create more and equal opportunities for all, regardless of identity.
- ⇒ Campaign about individuality and uniqueness of experiences to avoid homogenising identities.
- ⇒ All staff networks and communities should be more visible across all campuses and departments of the University.

LGBT+ Staff Community

Recommendation 43: The LGBT+ Staff Community to develop stronger links with other networks and communities as well as the EDI Committee of the University to develop conversations further about intersected identities.

Recommendation 44: The LGBT+ Staff Community and the University to explicitly recognise that ‘belonging’ to the LGBT+ population does not necessitate the labelling of the person with any of the identities referred to in the acronym LGBT+.

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