Pride and Prejudice in Education

An exploration of experiences and perceptions of sexual orientation and gender identity among post school education learners and staff

Summarised version

The Forum project team was drawn from the following Forum member organisations

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)

Learning and Work Institute (pre-merger organisation NIACE)

National Union of Students (NUS)

University and College Union (UCU)

Pride and Prejudice in Education:

An Exploration of experience and perceptions of sexual orientation and gender identity among post-school education learners and staff

This is a summarised version produced in the autumn of 2016. This report is based on the Forum Pride and Prejudice in Education report published in February 2016. There is more detailed information, including further statistics, within the full report which can be found at
https://sgforum.org.uk/resources/pride/

Introduction

The Pride and Prejudice report presents findings from research carried out by the Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equality in Post School Education (The Forum)[i] during December 2014 -January 2015. Learners in further education, and staff in further and higher education, were asked to complete an online survey exploring their perceptions and experiences of sexual orientation and gender identity in their place of learning or work.[ii] The research explores experiences in a broad range of educational environments including universities, colleges, adult and community, land-based, work-based, sixth form and specialist providers. Overall, 1505 people involved in post-school education took part, 930 learners and 575 staff.

The research explored particular experiences related to bullying and harassment, student drop out, organisational environment and monitoring.

Language, Definitions and Concepts

Terminology/Abbreviations used in this report

Gender Identity

- **Binary Gendered**: individuals who self-identify as either male or female, including trans men and women.

- **Cis-gendered:** individuals who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender Expression:** an individual's choice of how they present themselves in terms of behaviour, clothing, hairstyle, voice etc. this can alter day to day and may not be consistent with gender identity
- **Gender Reassignment:** changing gender from one binary gender to another

- **Non-Binary Gendered**. Individuals who define their gender identity as not male or female. This group includes those who describe themselves as 'Genderqueer', 'X' or 'Other'.
- **T / Trans** individuals who describe their gender identity differently to that assigned at birth.
- **X:** survey respondents were given the option to define as 'X', and given the following definition: 'We use 'X' as an option to describe gender identity to enable anyone who wishes to do so to choose a gender identity that is different to the traditional female and male. We recognise that this option is usually used by intersex and some trans-identifying people who regard their identity as a third sex.

Sexual Orientation
- **Heterosexual:** individuals who identify as either heterosexual or straight.
- **LGB:** lesbian, gay and/or bisexual.
- **LGB+:** individuals who define their sexual orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, undecided or 'other'

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

- **LGBT:** lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans - used when referring to previous studies where the focus has been lesbian, gay, bisexual and / or trans identifying people. It has also been used as an umbrella term for organised groups
- **LGBTQ+:** is used as an umbrella term to include all those who identify as non-heterosexual and / or binary gendered: this reflects the survey questions and acronyms that are in use at the time of this survey.

General
- **Learner/student**: both terms are used interchangeably in the report, but 'learner' is generally used to describe people in further education, and 'student' is used to describe those in higher education.

Research of different sexual orientations and gender identities in education has been a relatively recent enterprise. Over even such a short time the language and categories used to describe and engage research participants has evolved. This reflects how people themselves define their sexual orientation and gender identities.

For sexual orientation the terms 'lesbian', 'gay' and 'bisexual' have remained relatively stable and in common usage. However in recent studies researchers began to use other categories. These include 'undecided' and 'other', and it is now standard practice to provide research participants with the option to describe their sexual orientation in their own words.

Awareness about the diversity of gender identity has gone beyond the binary construct. As a result the terminology used to describe gender-variant people has seen considerable change and developments. The law only protects a very narrow group of people (those undergoing or who have undergone gender reassignment) Research studies have increasingly sought to capture the experiences of a range of trans and non-binary people, rather than just those protected by the law. Not all trans people identify within the binary gender construct (male – female) but many do. Some non-binary identifying people do not identify themselves as trans though the broadest application of the term trans could be considered to be inclusive as it could be taken to mean being beyond the binary construct of gender identity. While these changes are to be welcomed it can make comparisons between surveys difficult. As different surveys may reflect the experiences of slightly different groups. For example, in the present survey we used non-binary gendered as a term for all those who identified as other than male or female. We counted all those who ticked the 'gender identity different to the sex assigned at birth' box according to the box they ticked in the sex monitoring category. These considerations must be taken into account when making any comparisons between and/or drawing conclusions across research studies

Bullying and Harassment

Negative behaviour of learners towards others because of their sexual orientation had been witnessed by over half of all (staff and learner) respondents. Just under half of all respondents had witnessed negative behaviour towards people based on their gender identity. 10% of learner respondents reported they witnessed this every day. A consistent finding was that LGB+ and non-binary respondents reported witnessing and experiencing negative behaviour, including all forms of bullying, more than heterosexual and binary gendered respondents. Bi, homo and / or trans phobic name calling had been experienced by 17% of all staff respondents. 59% of non-binary learners had experienced this. Heterosexual and binary gendered respondents made far fewer reports of experiencing this negative behaviour or name calling.

Experience of Negative Behaviour reported by LGB+ and non-binary identifying respondents
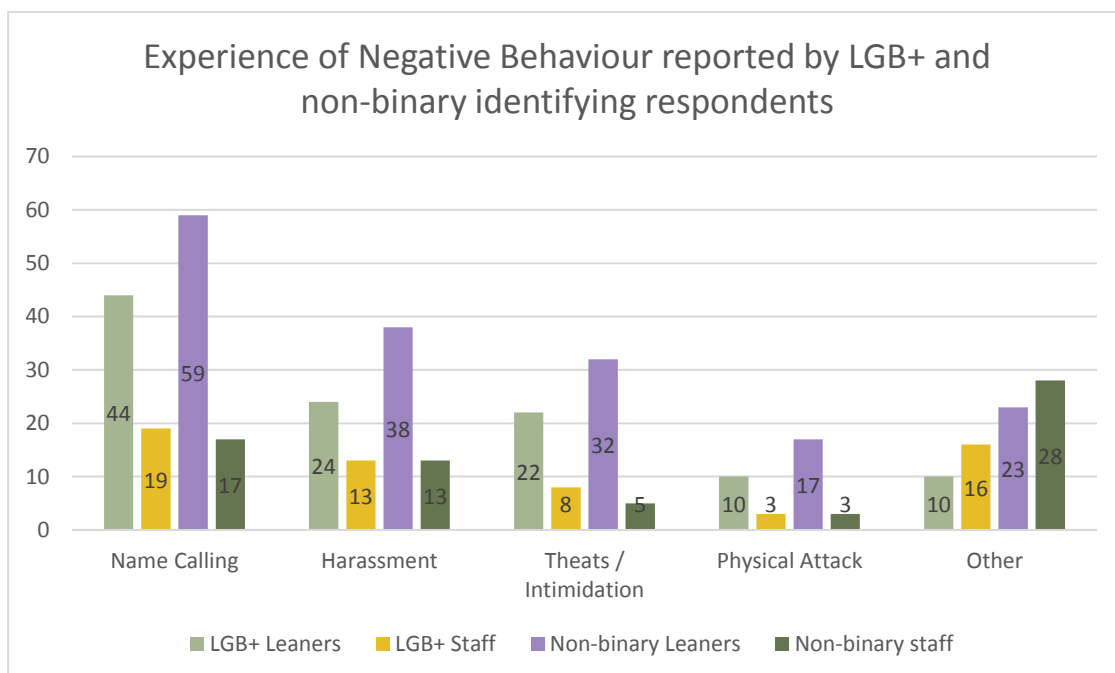
Reporting of bullying and harassment was well understood by staff. Over 75% of staff respondents said they knew who to report bullying to in their organisation. However, only just over half reported it. In most cases staff respondents had reported the bullying to a representative of their staff union.

87% of respondents stated that they felt confident in challenging homophobia, but fewer reported confidence challenging biphobia (78%) and transphobia (79%).

Bullying and Harassment - report recommendations

- Focus efforts on protecting and preventing learners from experiencing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, harassment and assault by staff or other learners. Establish a clear first point of contact for learners to report incidents and have appropriate reporting and disciplinary mechanisms in place to address complaints.
- Ensure that derogatory language and discriminatory behaviour is challenged as a matter of course. For example, by widely publicising equality policy or developing a 'zero tolerance' approach to LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment
- Focus on equipping staff with the understanding and skills to identify and challenge inappropriate behaviour and encourage good relations between people of different sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Take steps to enable all staff to

    i. understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity
    ii. work in an environment that is free from discrimination, harassment and bullying
    iii. deal with instances of unacceptable behaviour among learners and staff
    iv. provide support for colleagues who are targets of bullying and harassment

- Address harassment, bullying and unacceptable behaviour in the learning environment by building discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity and other equality issues into the content/delivery of the curriculum.

Dropping Out

An average 35% of all learner respondents reported considering dropping out of their course. The percentage of non-binary identifying learners who thought about dropping out of their course was 47%, almost half.

Of that 35% of all learners only 6% considered dropping out of their course due to bullying or harassment. This rose to 13% of lgb+ learners and 16% of non-binary learners.

In real terms that means it is about 3 times more likely that a non-binary learner will consider dropping out due to bullying than would a binary gendered learner.

Dropping Out - report recommendations

The recommendation is that organisations should pay specific attention to the higher risk of non-binary learners dropping out of education, as suggested by the data. FE providers should ensure staff are appropriately trained to support non-binary learners and can signpost to support services including, where appropriate, third party LGBTQ+ organisations.

Within the organisation

The research showed that most respondents thought their organisations were trying to create environments where all feel valued and to encourage good relations between different groups. Most people were also aware that organisations have policies to protect people against sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination in the workplace. However it was largely considered that the policies are not well publicised and are thought to be not effective.

75% of non-binary identifying learners did not state that their place of learning provided good support. Similarly less than 25% of learner respondents reported there being an officially recognised LGBT+ group in their place of learning.

Lesbian/gay and bisexual learner respondents are more likely than average to be involved in activism and course representation; non-binary learners are also more likely than average to be a course representative.

Half of all staff respondents (52%) said that there was training around sexual orientation and gender identity equality.

Organisations - report recommendations

- Particular attention should be paid to developing more LGBTQ+ societies as an important means of support for LGBTQ+ learners.
- Harness the suggested higher levels of LGBTQ+ participation in course representation and activism to promote information about LGBTQ+ students' experiences to develop inclusive curriculum content and promote equality policies.
- Ensure that the voices of all staff - including those who do not define as heterosexual and/or male or female - are heard throughout the organisation. Having union representation on organisational equality committees will help achieve this, along with addressing sexual orientation and gender identity issues through equality fora, and reaching out to all sexual orientation and gender identity groups in consultations and surveys.
- Develop effective policies and procedures that address sexual orientation and gender identity equality and ensure that they are easy to find and well-publicised.

Monitoring

Over one quarter of staff respondents reported that they had not had opportunity to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity in any form of monitoring exercise. This contrasts significantly with over half stating that they would be prepared to disclose if given the opportunity. It was also noted that heterosexuals and those who identified as binary gendered (male or female) were more willing to disclose their sexual and / or gender identity to their employer. Learner respondents stated that in the majority of cases they were

not asked either their sexual or gender identity. 63% of learners stated that nothing would deter them from stating their sexual orientation if given the opportunity. 10% of LGB+ learners stated that they are not out to anyone, those that were out were in large part more likely to be out to friends than to teachers. This was significantly less than heterosexuals. Non- binary learners were also less confident about self-declaration than those who identified in binary terms

Monitoring - report recommendations

- Increase understanding amongst staff that many LGBTQ+ learners are not 'out'. Education providers and students' unions should assume that LGBTQ+ learners exist in all learning environments, which need to be inclusive and welcoming for everyone.
- When information is collected on learners' sexual orientation and gender identity for equality monitoring purposes, ensure that efforts are made to encourage reporting by reassuring and explaining the reasons for such data collection, and how the data will be stored. The language and terminology used should be up-to-date with best practice and ideally agreed with LGBTQ+ learners. Reporting on learners' sexual orientation and gender identity should remain completely voluntary.
- Wherever equality monitoring is carried out:

    i.   include questions around sexual orientation and gender identity
    ii. explain the purpose of the exercise
    iii. pay attention to the needs and concerns of staff and learners who are LGBTQ+(including asking appropriate questions about sexual orientation) and be sensitive to concerns about disclosure noting that environments can be made welcoming and enabling.
    iv. do not restrict staff and/or learners to male/female gender identities.
    v.   ensure confidentiality.

Postscript: How UCU is taking this further

UCU is sharing this report with all branches and asking branches to look at current practice at their institution. This will be followed up by a survey in 2017 amongst branches to investigate what actions are being taken to develop both sexual orientation and gender identity equality in post-school education. It is anticipated that there will be findings from this work which indicate what also can be done to ensure promotion of sexual orientation and gender identity equality across and within the sector.

---

[i] The Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equality in Post School Education promotes sexual orientation and gender identity equality in Further and Higher Education. For more information about our work, please visit our website: https://sgforum.org.uk The partner organisations that have developed this survey include: The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), National Union of Students (NUS) and University and College Union (UCU).

[ii] Students in higher education were not surveyed because they had been recently surveyed by NUS using a similar framework and research questions; see NUS (2014).