

The National



LGB&T Partnership

# A review into National Sports Governing Bodies response to LGB&T inclusion



Research and report  
by Lou Englefield

Published by Birmingham LGBT

March 2016



# Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. LGBT Health & Wellbeing	4
3. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Sport	4
3.1 Active People Survey	5
3.2 Tackling Homophobia & Transphobia in Sport: A Government Charter	5
3.3 Equality Act 2010	5
3.4 Transsexual People and Competitive Sport - Guidance For National Governing Bodies	6
3.5 Equality Standard for Sport	6
4. Surveying LGBT Participation	7
5. Good Practice	8
5.1. The RFL	8
5.2 Baseball Softball UK (BSUK)	9
5.3 The Lawn Tennis Association	9
6. Conclusion	10
7. Recommendations	11

ISBN 978-0-9935705-1-3

Published by Birmingham LGBT

© Lou Englefield

Designed by [www.markeastwood.co.uk](http://www.markeastwood.co.uk)

# 1. Introduction

Homophobia in sport is well documented. Research by Scotland's Equality Network 'Out for Sport' (2011)<sup>1</sup> shows that of more than 1,700 respondents, 79% thought that there was a problem of homophobia in sport, whilst 62% had witnessed or experienced homophobia or transphobia in sport. Amongst trans respondents the numbers of those having experienced or witnessed homophobia or transphobia in sport rose to 80%. These findings, whilst focused on Scotland, are widely seen as transferable to England.

Meanwhile, research undertaken by the National Union of Students during 2012, which surveyed the opinions of 845 LGBT students, found that 46.8% of respondents experienced sport culture as 'alienating or unwelcoming'. Whilst a third of LGB young people and 50% of young trans people aged 16-25 do not feel they can be open about their sexuality or gender identity in a sports club (Youth Chances, 2013<sup>2</sup>).

Although we might anticipate that fears and experiences of discrimination would impact negatively on LGBT people's desire to take part in sport and physical activity, the Active People Survey (APS), Sport England's physical activity insight tool, shows higher levels of participation in sport amongst lesbians and bisexual women, and only slightly lower levels of participation amongst gay men. Only participation amongst bisexual men is significantly lower (by 10%) than their heterosexual counterparts. Further analysis of APS and its findings in relation to sexual orientation can be found in section 2.1.

Within this context, between October 2014 and February 2015, Pride Sports undertook a survey of the 46 National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport funded by Sport England on behalf of the National LGB&T Partnership for Health and Well Being.

NGBs were asked to outline what insight they had gained, if any, into participation levels of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in their sport and what action, if any, they had undertaken to grow LGBT participation in their sport.

Of the 46 NGBs approached to provide information, 32 provided responses, either by email or by phone.

---

1 <http://www.equality-network.org/our-work/policyandcampaign/out-for-sport/>

2 [http://www.youthchances.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/YouthChancesSurvey-16-25yearOlds\\_FirstReferenceReport.pdf](http://www.youthchances.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/YouthChancesSurvey-16-25yearOlds_FirstReferenceReport.pdf)

## 2. LGBT Health & Wellbeing

The recently published 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGB&T) Public Health Outcomes Framework Companion Document' highlights the significant health inequalities experienced by LGB&T people. Evidence shows high rates of physical and emotional bullying, and risk of parental rejection and running away in childhood, as well as significantly higher rates of suicide and self-harm, drug and alcohol use and smoking in adulthood, and social isolation and extreme vulnerability in old age<sup>3</sup>. Research has also demonstrated that LGB&T individuals may experience a range of social inequalities. Homophobia/biphobia and transphobia can have a significant impact on LGB&T individual's engagement with society.

Meanwhile, the benefits of sports participation are well documented. As Sport England states, health benefits include:

- ▶ Physical activity, including sport, is linked to reduced risk of over 20 illnesses including cardiovascular disease and some cancers.
- ▶ Taking part in regular sport can save between £1,750 and £6,900 in healthcare costs per person.

There has also been extensive research to show that 'good social relationships and networks promote and are a protective factor for well being and mental health' and 'participation in regular physical activity can increase self-esteem and reduce stress and anxiety. Physical activity can help play a role in preventing mental health problems and improve the quality of life of those experiencing it'<sup>4</sup>

## 3. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and sport

Interest in the participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in sport in England first emerged in 2008, when the Sports Councils of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and UK Sport undertook a Literature Review of Sexual Orientation (SO) in Sport.<sup>5</sup> This report described substantial gaps in information on lesbian, gay and bisexual participation in sport but did not refer to trans participation and recommended investment in further research into key areas, and a range of policy recommendations, including:

- ▶ Provision of lifestyle support expertise for talented and elite athletes, focused on coming out, working with LGB/heterosexual peers, managing SO in different cultures, dealing with homophobia.
- ▶ Practical and policy guidance on ensuring inclusive sport for LGB people, especially for clubs, governing bodies and elite sport organisations.
- ▶ Development and dissemination of advice and guidance materials and systems for sports people dealing with SO issues.
- ▶ Preparation of advice sheets on service and facility provision for trans people in different sports similar to that produced by Press for Change
- ▶ Case studies to illustrate how processes and practices in different sports contexts can be adjusted to include LGBT sports people, coaches and other support roles.
- ▶ Development of leadership training about SO equality and impact assessment guidance, delivered to all lead sport body CEOs and key public officials working in sport.

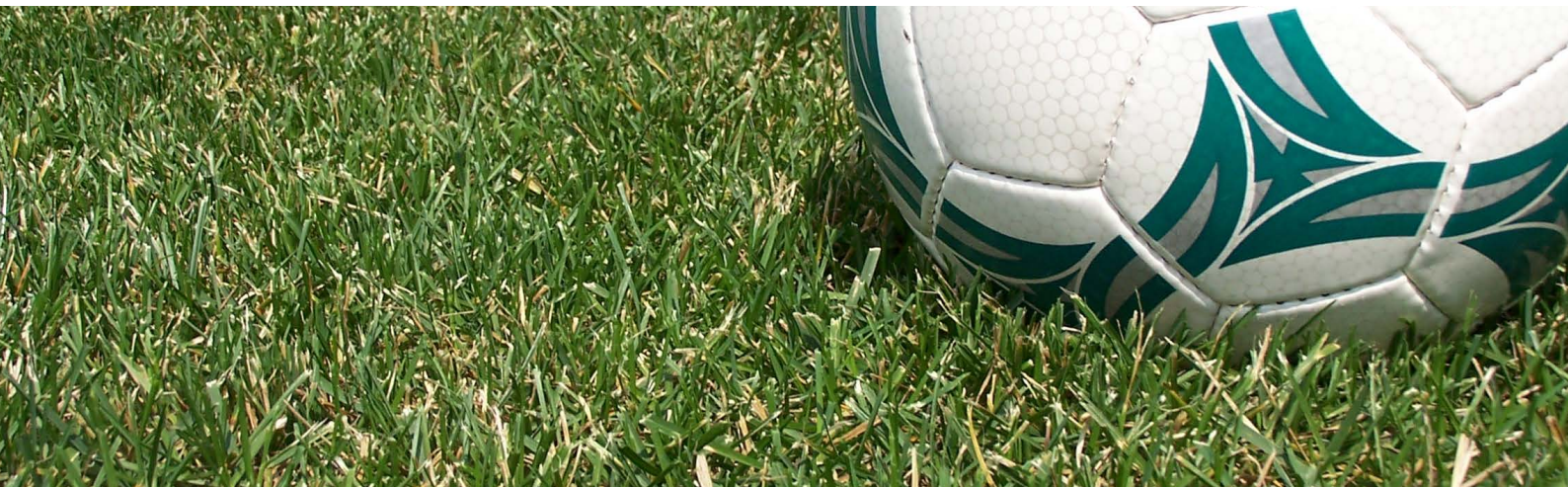
Unfortunately, few of these recommendations seem to have been taken up by stakeholders to date. Although, sexual orientation was included in the Active People Survey, Sport England's measure of sports participation in England, for the first time in October 2010.

3 <http://lgbt.foundation/downloads/191>

4 <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/pdf/publications/lets-get-physical-report.pdf>

5 <https://www.sportengland.org/media/174173/so-summary-final1.pdf>

### 3.1 Active People Survey (APS)



The most recent data from the Active People Survey, APS 9 Q2 (2014/15) show 41.4% of heterosexual men taking part in sport, 35.8% of gay men taking part in sport and 42.7% of bisexual men taking part in sport at least once a week. Meanwhile, 30.8% of heterosexual women take part in sport once a week compared to 38.7% of lesbians and 33.4% of bisexual women. According to these overarching results, the focus of concern for National Governing Bodies should be the low rate of participation amongst gay men.

Further analysis of the data, however, shows an overrepresentation of lesbians (35.3%) and bisexual women (32.8%) in individual sports; as opposed to 28.5% of the heterosexual sample and this contrasts with 1v1 and team sports, in which the latest figures show a sample size insufficient to be of relevance amongst both lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents. Figures relating to gym use across sexual orientation, also present an interesting picture, with 18.6% of gay male respondents reporting use of a gym compared with 14.3% of heterosexual male respondents, but sample sizes amongst bisexual men, women, and lesbians being insufficient to record.

These figures suggest a sporting landscape in which lesbians, gay men and bisexual people are most active in individual sports compared with 1 v 1 and team sports, and gay men are more active users of the gym.

Data gathered from APS in relation to sexual orientation should, however, be approached with caution. Over the four-year period during which data on sexual orientation have been gathered, significant variations (between 7% and 14%) occur in results relating to gay and bisexual responses, whilst responses from the heterosexual population remain largely stable within a 2% variable.

It is unlikely that actual fluctuations in participation of this size occur amongst the lesbian, gay and bisexual population over this period, and more likely that these fluctuations represent the smaller sample size of data gathered in relation to lesbians, gay men and bisexual people through the survey.

APS 9 Q2 (2014/15) does not ask a question about gender identity, although APS now asks participants how they see themselves, as 'male', 'female' or 'in another way'.

### 3.2 Tackling Homophobia & Transphobia in Sport: A Government Charter<sup>6</sup>

Also launched in 2011 was the Government Charter for tackling homophobia and transphobia in sport. Devised by the Government Equalities Office, the Charter was supported by five founding signatory organisations, the FA, RFL, RFU, ECB and the LTA.

The Charter was largely a communication tool to raise awareness of the need for sport to challenge homophobia and transphobia. Disseminated primarily via social media, the Charter did have a significant reach, attracting support from NGBs, sports clubs, and, to a lesser extent, County Sports Partnerships and university athletics unions.

6 <http://sta.geo.useconnect.co.uk/pdf/FINALcharter.pdf>

However, despite the reach of its message, the lack of action taken by sports National Governing Bodies in creating LGBT inclusive environments has led to substantial criticism of the Charter. No resources were made available to National Governing Bodies to implement the call for action to ‘ make sport a welcoming place for everyone’, and no guidelines were produced to show National Governing Bodies how to achieve the Charter’s ambitions.

### **3.3 Equality Act 2010**

Of course, the Equality Act 2010 had a significant impact on sport, with sexual orientation and gender identity named as characteristics protected under the Act. Special rules for sports clubs meant that it became unlawful to restrict the participation of a transsexual person in sports competition unless concerns about health and safety and unfair advantage came into play.

### **3.4 Transsexual People and Competitive Sport – Guidance For National Governing Bodies<sup>7</sup>**

The new legislation potentially made sport more accessible to transgender people, insisting that transgender participants be welcomed in the gender in which they presented to sports clubs. However, the proviso regarding fair play and health and safety left some room for interpretation, especially as National Governing Bodies were used to working to the IOC’s Stockholm Consensus.<sup>8</sup> The commissioning of the Transsexual People and Competitive Sport Guidance by the Sports Council Equality Group has gone some way to helping improve access to participation and competition for transgender people in terms of sports regulation.

### **3.5 Equality Standard For Sport**

Meanwhile the Equality Standard For Sport<sup>9</sup> remains Sport England’s preferred regulation framework for equal opportunities in sport and the sports council provides some support for National Governing Bodies to progress through the standard; Foundation through to Advanced levels. However, whereas other sports councils have made progression through the standard a mandatory requirement of funding, Sport England still doesn’t appear to have taken this step, leaving NGBs to progress through the Standard at their own pace.

Within the current funding cycle 2014-17, increased pressure on sports governing bodies due to significantly reduced funding, means that not all NGBs will prioritise allocating valuable resources to progressing through the Equality Standard.

Additionally, as part of the survey of NGBs undertaken for this report, Pride Sports came across one NGB, which had progressed beyond the initial levels of the standard, but had undertaken no monitoring of sexual orientation amongst its membership and therefore no subsequent action on LGBT participation and engagement. This has to raise questions about the efficacy of the Equality Standard in addressing LGBT participation and inclusion.

---

7 <http://www.equalityinsport.org/equality-groups/gender-reassignment/publications/>

8 [www.olympic.org/documents/reports/en/en\\_report\\_905.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/documents/reports/en/en_report_905.pdf)

9 <http://www.equalityinsport.org>

## 4. Surveying LGBT participation

Forty-six National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) are funded by Sport England, the sports council with responsibility for creating opportunities for participation in sport in England. Funding of these National Governing Bodies can be categorized for the purposes of this report in the following ways:

- ▶ Group 1. NGBs funded between £9 million and £32 million - 17
- ▶ Group 2. NGBs funded between £2.3 million and £7.5 million - 9
- ▶ Group 3. NGBs funded up to £2.3 million - 20

As Sport England outlines on its website 'All of these governing bodies are experts in their sport and they have developed programmes that address the specific problems that are stopping people from playing'.

For this survey, NGBs were contacted over a four-month period. Where known Equalities Leads existed, these were contacted directly, whilst other approaches were made through Chief Executives, Development Directors, Insight Managers and other key personnel. In cases where this information couldn't be found, approaches were made by email to info addresses and then follow-up conversations and email exchanges were made with designated staff.

Of the 34 National Governing Bodies responding to requests for information, the following was found

- ▶ 18 NGBs (53% of those responding to the survey) have gathered no insight into LGBT participation in their sport
- ▶ 2 NGBs have gathered no insight, but have supported LGBT events and activity when LGBT sports organisers have approached them.
- ▶ 5 NGBs have gathered data, but at present have no plans to focus on growth in LGBT participation (of these, two sports show representative levels of participation, two sports were unable to generate sample sizes significant enough & one NGB gathered data showing underrepresentation, but was currently focusing on other equalities priorities.)
- ▶ 9 NGBs (28% of those responding to the survey) have gained insight, either through data collection, consultation with the LGBT community or qualitative research projects and are currently working on projects to increase participation by LGBT people
- ▶ 2 NGBs also referred to the development of their trans policy in line with the recommendations from the Sports Council Equality Group.

Based on the breakdown of funding to National Governing Bodies of Sport, it would be fair to assume that those taking the most action on LGBT participation would be those NGBs that are better resourced. This, however, was found to be only partly true.

Whilst five of the National Governing Bodies, which have gathered insight and are taking targeted action to increase participation are in the top 17 funded NGBs (Group 1.), one can be found in Group 2., and two can be found amongst the least funded NGBs in the country.

Likewise, those NGBs having gathered no insight into LGBT participation in their sport can be found across all three funding groups. Reasons given for lack of targeted work in this area included:

- ▶ The perception that sexuality has 'nothing to do with sport'
- ▶ Current data-capture tools inadequate to produce insight into sexual orientation and gender identity (3 NGBs are currently working to improve their monitoring systems)
- ▶ The findings of APS appearing to show their sport offers positive engagement to the wider population, even though affiliated membership numbers are not representative of the LGBT community.
- ▶ Other equalities priorities and limited resources
- ▶ A lack of confidence in this area

Whilst some of the smaller NGBs cited capacity as a reason for lack of work in this area, it is clear that resourcing is not the only disincentive for targeted LGBT inclusion work.

On a positive note, several of the smaller NGBs took the opportunity of the approach from Pride Sports during this survey to express interest in LGBT inclusion and to look for potential engagement.

# 5. Good Practice

Examples of good practice in LGBT engagement can be found amongst National Governing Bodies of all sizes. For example:

## 5.1 The RFL



Over a period of three years, Rugby Football League undertook a programme of work on LGBT inclusion, which included the following:

- ▶ Gaining insight through a designated action research programme ‘Perceptions and experiences of Rugby League: LGBT young people’<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ Consultation with a range of LGB organisations on the development of a ‘Tackle Homophobia’<sup>11</sup> guide for clubs.
- ▶ Consultation with several trans individuals and organisations in order to develop an inclusive RFL trans policy
- ▶ Two Equality and Diversity conferences which included LGBT input

And subsequent action to increase LGBT participation:

- ▶ Mandatory training for all staff including LGBT issues
- ▶ Several professional clubs holding designated games to raise awareness of the Tackle IT! campaign and LGBT inclusion
- ▶ Presence at a range of Pride events, including World Pride
- ▶ Supported the establishment of an LGBT rugby league club
- ▶ Development of a range of LGBT inclusion education resources for clubs
- ▶ Support for a trans coach to gain a level 2 coaching qualification
- ▶ Tackled homophobic language and behaviour by players with robust fines and bans

10 <http://www.igualdad.ull.es/archivos/documentacion/RFL%20LGBT%20Research%20doc%20FINAL%20APRIL%202012.pdf>

11 [http://rflmedia.therfl.co.uk/docs/Guidance\\_for\\_Rugby\\_League\\_clubs\\_-\\_Challenging\\_homophobia.pdf](http://rflmedia.therfl.co.uk/docs/Guidance_for_Rugby_League_clubs_-_Challenging_homophobia.pdf)



## 5.2 Baseball Softball UK (BSUK)

BSUK, one of the smaller NGBs in England developed a baseline survey in 2014, which captured data on sexual orientation. They learned that 11% of their membership identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Over a number of years the NGB has supported the growth of London Raiders, an LGBT softball club, which has become one of the largest softball clubs in the UK, with approximately 200 members. BSUK has also worked with Pride Sports in the North West of England to run LGBT participation programmes, which have included an indoor softball series and a summer programme. BSUK will be working again this summer on an LGBT participation initiative in Manchester.

## 5.3 Lawn Tennis Association

The LTA has undertaken a programme of LGBT inclusion work, which continues to be developed. In terms of insight gained, the national governing body for tennis has:

- ▶ Collected monitoring data for British Tennis Membership/ talent programme, staff, coaches, officials
- ▶ Set up an LGBT steering group open to tennis staff and external LGB&T organisations and tennis to gain insight into tennis experience
- ▶ Consulted with LGBT members of the Tennis Youth panel regarding issues relating specifically to LGB&T and wider equalities issues

The LTA has also taken the following action to ensure LGBT engagement:

- ▶ Engaged in a number of LGBT events, such as Pride House London 2012, Brighton Pride, and London World Pride
- ▶ Delivered an extensive training programme for staff and coaches and performance centres with LGBT element
- ▶ Introduced a Trans policy<sup>12</sup> and guidance which is being redeveloped in light of new recommendations
- ▶ Worked with trans individuals in tennis – dealing with complaints and request for information and support
- ▶ Established an LGBT steering group and sought buy-in from all staff,
- ▶ Supported London Tennis International tournament (London's LGBT Tennis Club)
- ▶ Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of LTA delivery, including all protected characteristics referenced in level 1 and 2 coaching course, officials course, tennis mark

---

12 <http://www.lta.org.uk/globalassets/about-lta/equality--diversity/2014-transgender-people-in-tennis-404kb.pdf>

## 6. Conclusion

It is clear that homophobia and transphobia in sport remain a concern for LGBT people and present a barrier to participation. Although, with the exception of a minority of sports, it seems National Governing Bodies remain reticent to tackle the issue beyond signing up to the Government Charter, which ultimately requires no action from NGBs.

Leadership on LGBT inclusion and participation is currently lacking and fluctuations exist in the data that is being produced through the Active People Survey. This makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the participation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in sport. It is also clear that the Equality Standard is not an adequate tool in addressing LGBT inclusion and that whilst guidance on developing more inclusive trans policies for competition will undoubtedly have some impact, policy alone will not help remove barriers to participation in sport for transgender people, who remain one of the most excluded groups from organised sport in England.

Furthermore, in a climate of austerity and diminished resources and with an increasing emphasis on growing participation, it is likely that many NGBs will focus work on raising the participation of other underrepresented groups, which offer potentially greater outcomes in terms of numbers of participants. A focus on women's participation and disability sport, for example, may potentially yield greater results in terms of impact on APS figures.

## 7. Recommendations

In order to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are able to fully access the health benefits associated with sport and physical activity, it is recommended that:

- Resourcing is made available in this area to support NGBs to engage with LGBT people
- Guidance and support is made available in a similar way to that offered to other protected characteristics (e.g. women, faith, ethnicity, disability)
- NGBs undertake robust data-capture with regards to sexual orientation and gender identity of all participants/members where possible
- Where underrepresentation exists, target programmes for increasing participation by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people
- NGBs should implement guidelines for clubs to tackle homophobia and transphobia, particularly in youth sport and provide education for coaches and administrators
- NGBs should take advantage of the growing number of LGBT organisations specialising in sports participation and work in partnership to grow LGBT inclusive offers
- NGBs should consult and work with LGBT sports groups to support their growth and development, encouraging affiliation where possible
- NGBs should ensure that targeted campaigns to increase participation from other equality groups, e.g. women, are LGBT-inclusive.

