

PE1573/D

**Consideration of Petition PE 15673 (Statutory Teaching of LGBTI+ Issues)
Submission to Public Petitions Committee, December 2015
LGBT Youth Scotland**

Dear Convenor,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the petition on the statutory teaching of LGBTI+ issues. LGBT Youth Scotland is the largest youth and community-based organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland. Based on over 25 years of experience working directly with LGBT young people, we have made education a top policy priority.

In a survey of over 300 LGBT young people, we asked what respondents thought helped or could help them and others feel safe and supported within education. The 114 write-in responses highlighted three main categories:

1. Visibility in the curriculum: teachers and subjects normalising LGBT people, same-sex relationships, and transgender identities.
2. Inclusion: the wish for teachers to be confident discussing these issues and embedding them in other subject areas
3. Teachers and other staff to instantly address homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia whenever it manifests itself, and before it develops into overt bullying¹.

These responses clearly show the need for whole school approaches to promoting LGBT inclusion and responding to discrimination.

Teaching about identities and rights

Ensuring that LGBT young people feel included in education goes beyond simply challenging prejudice based bullying when it takes place. Young people must be made aware of their right to an education free from bullying and harassment and know how to report the prejudice-based bullying they experience or witness. Without teacher confidence to challenge everyday examples of discrimination and normalise LGBT identities and visibility in the curriculum, LGBT young people experiencing bullying may not realise that they have the right to be included in educational life. Our 2012 research found that the majority of LGBT young people would not feel confident reporting homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying in schools.

Research on *Prejudice Based Bullying in Scottish Schools* found that schools more often taught pupils about general bullying than prejudice². There was a correlation between the types of prejudice based bullying addressed in anti-bullying policies, teacher confidence to

¹ Lough Dennell, Brandi Lee and Caitlin Logan (2015) [Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Education Report](#). LGBT Youth Scotland.

² Lough Dennell, Brandi Lee and Caitlin Logan (2015) [Prejudice Based Bullying in Scottish Schools](#). EHRC, LGBT Youth Scotland, *respectme*.

teach about the protected characteristic and deal with that form of bullying, and pupil awareness of the protected characteristic. At the time of analysis, in January-February 2014, only 7 education authority anti-bullying policies referenced all 7 protected characteristics relevant to education³.

Inclusive Content and Materials

Lessons that challenge prejudice and normalise identities do more than reduce bullying behaviour, they send a clear message to all pupils that the identities discussed are valued. When young people do not see themselves reflected in the life of the school—whether through visual representations, curricular content and discussion, policies, equalities monitoring forms, or activities—they are unlikely to feel included in the institution. A whole school approach to LGBT-inclusion helps schools ensure that they are meeting the SHANARRI health and wellbeing indicators within the GIRFEC approach. The SHANARRI indicators below show how a whole school approach creates a positive learning environment.

Safe: young people are protected from discrimination (homophobia, biphobia and transphobia) and do not unintentionally place themselves in harmful situations as a result of receiving inadequate or incorrect information in relation to LGBT people, same-sex relationships or transgender identities.

‘We are taught a lot about ‘normal’ heterosexual sex...but absolutely nothing about homosexual sex or protection in that kind of sex. For example, I had to look up [an erotic literature website] on the Internet to learn about lesbian sex—not the best source of accurate information as you may imagine. I also had no idea that lesbian sex carried risk of STIs.’

Healthy: LGBT young people receive adequate and correct information on healthy relationships and sexual health, feel included in the social life of their educational institution, and receive LGBT-specific support when necessary. There is recognition that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia can negatively impact on a child or young person’s health and steps are taken to reduce this.

Achieving: young people study or train within an LGBT-inclusive environment with positive regard for all young people’s families, relationships, and gender identities or expressions.

Nearly 45% of all respondents stated that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the educational institution, regardless of whether or not they had experienced direct bullying, had a negative impact on their education and 10% of all respondents had left education as a result of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia⁴.

Nurtured: young people understand that they will receive support and guidance on the issues that affect their lives from the professionals around them, including non-judgemental discussions on LGBT themes.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Lough Dennell, Brandi Lee and Caitlin Logan (2012) *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Education Report*. LGBT Youth Scotland.

'I think if the teachers at school had been more comfortable with the issue it would have been a big help. It's very unnerving to be in class having 'you' being discussed and the teacher being obviously uncomfortable.'

Active: young people have age and identity-specific socialisation opportunities, which could include provision for LGBT-specific student or youth groups.

Respected: young people's voices are included and considered in decisions that affect them, particularly those that may impact upon their ability to freely express their identities as LGBT people. LGBT young people have the right to come out and be valued. LGBT children and young people's sexual orientations, gender identities or gender expressions are private and will not be shared without consent.

Responsible: young people receive appropriate information and guidance on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. They are committed to respect for others and develop informed views of complex issues.

Included: young people who are LGBT are treated as full members of their community and their contribution is respected. Policies are in place to support LGBT children and young people's inclusion. Negative stereotypes of LGBT people are challenged.

Whole School Approach

From our experience supporting schools and education authorities through the LGBT Charter, our capacity building programme, we know that a whole school or education authority approach makes a clear difference to LGBT pupils and staff⁵. The LGBT Charter was originally developed based on a 2005 collaboration with a group of LGBT young people in Dumfries. We developed the young people's original charter into our current LGBT Charter programme to support professionals across a range of sectors. The LGBT Charter makes a difference because it starts by delivering bespoke training to school staff (not simply restricted to teachers), who are then supported to review their policies and practices across a range of standards. In addition to training and policies, the LGBT Charter includes: increasing the visibility of LGBT identities across materials and within classrooms; youth involvement; support to start LGBT-inclusive pupil groups; undertaking consultations with pupils and staff to assess the needs of LGBT people and their families, and monitoring, to name a few⁶.

Conclusion

Improvements in LGBT students' educational experiences have not been consistent within Scottish schools and there are still high levels of prejudice and exclusion. Although we have worked productively with both the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to address this, the evidence indicates that education is not getting it right for every LGBT child and young person. Leadership is required to support the whole-school approach of staff training, inclusive policies, visibility of LGBT identities within the curriculum and other programmes,

⁵ You can hear pupils, staff and parents from one school speak about the improvements they've witnessed through involvement with the LGBT Schools Charter. [LGBT Schools Charter film](#).

⁶ More information on the LGBT Charter can be accessed here: www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/charter



and equalities monitoring, to ensure that LGBT-inclusion becomes embedded into the policies and practices of every school in Scotland.

Sincerely,
Brandi Lee Lough Dennell (Assistant Policy Director)