Background

Stonewall Scotland was established in 2000. Since then we have been campaigning for equality and justice for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people living in Scotland. We work with businesses, the public sector, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and a range of partners to improve the lived experience of LGBT people in Scotland.

As one of the organisations in Scotland working to tackle LGBT prejudice within sport, we are pleased to be able to provide our input into this consultation and to share our knowledge on LGBT people’s participation in grassroots sport and barriers to participation and inclusion. Our response focuses on questions 1-4.

LGBT Participation in Sport

LGB people are far more likely than heterosexual counterparts to drop out of grassroots sport as they get older. Although 61 per cent of gay young men take part in team sports, this drops to 37 per cent of gay male adults (Out on the Fields, 2015). Although there is a lack of research into the rates of participation in sport amongst trans people, available evidence highlights a number of barriers, and suggests that participation is likely to be low. Metro Youth Chances Survey (2014) found that 41 per cent of trans young people said that they would not join a sports club, twice the rate of heterosexual cisgender young people (Metro Youth Chances Survey, 2014).

Barriers to Participation

1. Homophobia and anti-LGBT abuse in sport
Anti-LGBT abuse continues to be a significant issue for LGBT people in sport, deterring many from participating. This area was recently the focus of a UK Parliament committee inquiry (Homophobia in Sport, Culture Media and Sport Committee, 2016). ICM research carried out for Stonewall last year found that 60 per cent of sports fans in Scotland have witnessed language/behaviour which was offensive to LGBT people in a sports setting, including at live games and when watching sport. However, there is an appetite from the public to change this culture; 59 per cent of sports fans think this kind of behaviour is a problem.

2. Bullying in school sport
Negative experiences of school sport have also been identified as a factor in dropping out of sport – 30 per cent of gay men identified their experiences of PE at school as discouraging them from participating in sport as an adult (Out on the Fields, 2015). One in seven LGBT pupils (14 per cent) are bullied during sports lessons, rising to three
in ten trans pupils. Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language is a frequent problem, with more than half of LGBT pupils (54 per cent) ‘frequently’ or ‘often’ hearing homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language in sports lessons. Changing facilities are often unsafe spaces, with one in five LGBT pupils and one in four trans pupils being bullied in changing rooms (School Report 2017, Stonewall).

3. Trans exclusion in school sport
In addition to experiences of bullying and discriminatory language, many trans young people are actively excluded from sports facilities and teams. Two in three (67 per cent) trans young people say they are prevented from using the changing rooms they feel comfortable in at school. 64 per cent say they are not able to play for the sports team they feel comfortable in. These experiences have a direct impact on trans young people’s feelings towards school sport. Trans pupils who are able to play for the sports team they feel comfortable in are three times more likely to feel welcome and included in sports lessons at school than those who are not (60 per cent compared to 20 per cent).

4. Discrimination in sports facilities
LGBT people continue to experience poor treatment when accessing public services, and leisure centres are no exception. One in eight (12 per cent) LGBT people have had a negative experience which they felt to be related to their sexual orientation or gender identity when accessing sport and leisure facilities, such as their local gym. This rises to a third of trans people (Your Services Your Say, 2014). These experiences can act as a deterrent to physical activity, leading to a loss of confidence in accessing all leisure facilities.

5. Specific barriers to trans people’s participation in sport
In addition to experiences of bullying, abuse and discrimination experienced by the LGBT community, trans people can face additional barriers. A small-scale consultation carried out by LEAP Sport Scotland, looking at barriers to trans people participating in swimming, identified that more than half experienced barriers directly related to their trans status. Often these barriers were related to anxieties about body image or gender dysphoria.

“Gender dysphoria is cited as the most common barrier, closely followed by issues related to swimwear and binding, with many others mentioning changing rooms. Some of the specific issues discussed included feeling concerned about people staring, about being less able to ‘pass’ or maintain identity within a swimming environment, and having to make a choice between wearing swimwear associated with one’s previous gender or having bodies or body parts on show. Other barriers to participation (29%) were common sources of concern for transgender people which include issues such as anxiety around body image.” Swimming in Glasgow For the Transgender Community, LEAP Sports, 2015.

Provision of trans specific groups can help alleviate these barriers and anxieties. Of those who are not currently swimming, almost 60 per cent of those who were not currently swimming said they would be interested in a trans specific swimming initiative, which they felt would be safer and more accessible for them. While a trans specific swimming initiative has now been set up in Glasgow, there are very few of these initiatives currently operating in Scotland.
Policies and practices for professional athletes can also act as a deterrent for trans people in taking part in grassroots level sport. University groups and teams are often obliged to uphold competitive level standards, meaning that young people are required to meet unrealistic and unnecessarily high standards. Fears around being held to this standard can also put people off taking part in recreational sport.

“People who only want to have a kick around and who just want to do some sport activity at university are being excluded. They are not allowed to play because there is fear, there is lack of awareness and there is lack of knowledge around being this one thing or the other.” Jay Stewart, Gendered Intelligence, Trans Inquiry Report, House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2015

Removing Barriers to Participation
There are a number of steps that organisations can take to encourage more LGBT people to stay involved in sport.

**Schools**
Given the impact that experiences of PE can have on people’s participation in sport, we believe schools have an important role to play. Tackling bullying in changing rooms, ensuring that staff are trained to support LGBT young people, and developing clear policies to support trans young people can all help LGBT young people have more positive experiences of sport, and stay involved. Schools can also take part in the Rainbow Laces campaign to help promote LGBT inclusion in sport.

**Leisure Services**
It is important that local leisure services understand the needs of LGBT service users, and that staff are trained appropriately. Leisure services can also support LGBT and trans specific sports initiatives, such as Seahorses Swimming Club, by providing a safe space for them to practice and train. Growing numbers of these initiatives, many of which are facilitated by LEAP sports, which are helping LGBT people to get involved in sport, and provide a useful insight into community led ways to increase participation.