More Than a Phase

A resource guide for the inclusion of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners

Understanding the Issues

pobal
supporting communities

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generously gave of their time, knowledge and insights to inform the direction and
content of the guide. The members of the Advisory Group were as follows:

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researching and writing the guide.

This guide is a valuable resource for all involved in formal and non formal education. It should underpin a new visibility for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in a broad range of learning environments. It should inform and shape a new practice by providers of formal and non formal education in recognising and responding effectively to a diversity of sexual identities among learners and participants. It should secure safe learning environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

This is an important initiative in a context of significant and entrenched inequalities experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. At the heart of these inequalities is the issue of recognition – the current status and standing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people within society and within the various institutions and organisations of this society. An inequality of recognition is evident in the invisibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their issues, in the absence of appropriate support to meet the needs specific to these groups, and in the failure to accord legal recognition to same sex couples on a par with heterosexual couples and to accord legal recognition to transsexual people in the gender in which they identify.

Inequality of recognition leads to and underpins other inequalities in access to resources, access to decision making and access to relationships of respect, care and solidarity. These inequalities are evident in both formal and non formal education. Equality in formal and non formal education has a significant contribution to make in eradicating such inequalities both within and beyond the education system. This publication provides valuable guidance for education providers in meeting this challenge.

The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 should provide a particular stimulus for action in relation to the issues raised in this guide.

The Acts prohibit discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, and victimisation in the provision of goods and services, education and accommodation. They cover nine grounds including the ground of sexual orientation and a gender ground that encompasses transgender people.

Under the Acts, employers are liable for discriminatory acts of an employee in the course of his or her employment unless they can prove that they took reasonably practicable steps to prevent the conduct. Likewise, a person who is responsible for the operation of an educational institution must ensure that any person who has a right to be there is not harassed or sexually harassed. The responsible person will be liable for the harassment or sexual harassment unless he or she took reasonably practicable steps to prevent. This liability underpins the need for a proactive approach by providers of non formal and formal education to the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

The guide usefully emphasises the importance of responding to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners within a wider commitment to equality. This ensures that the diversity among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people is addressed and that that they are placed at the heart of any ambition for an inclusive educational establishment.

Pobal are to be congratulated on the publication of this guide. Local area based partnerships, second-level schools/learning centres and youth groups provide an important audience for the guide and able advocates for its implementation to promote equality and combat discrimination amongst young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners.

Niall Crowley

CEO, Equality Authority

1

Introduction

Young people engage in a vast array of learning activities. They attend school and often participate in local youth clubs and community-based educational initiatives. Young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners, in comparison to many other young people, often feel unsafe in these settings. They can experience bullying and frequently find themselves subjected to jokes, innuendo and harassment. So what do they do? In many cases they stop attending school or fail to participate in any youth activities. Others may experience high levels of depression with the accompanying higher risks of suicide.

There is an immediate need in Irish second-level schools and in youth and community education settings to tackle the silence and discrimination surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity. All young people should experience an education, both formal and non-formal, that enables them to reach their full potential as human beings. This is their right and entitlement. The basic needs of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners are the same as all other young learners, that is, to feel safe and secure in the learning environment, to have their identity recognised and celebrated by all participants in the process and to be able to reach their full potential as learners.

The purpose of this resource guide is to promote greater inclusion of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in all formal and non-formal educational settings. Promoting inclusion means being proactive in making efforts to ensure that all young people have access to and participate in education so that they can fulfil their potential. This resource guide aims to assist those who work in educational settings with young people to develop inclusive learning environments specifically in relation to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

1.1 Background to Resource Guide

This resource guide is published by Pobal under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP). Pobal is an intermediary company established by the European Commission and the Irish Government to promote social inclusion, reconciliation and equality through integrated social and economic development within communities. The LDSIP is one of the programmes that Pobal manages on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The programme is delivered by 38 Area-based Partnerships, 31 Community Partnerships and 2 Employment Pacts. The LDSIP consists of three measures with education and youth development actions predominantly located within the Community-Based Youth Initiatives (CBYI) measure. This resource guide has been developed to support the inclusion of young LGBT learners in formal and non-formal education settings.

The preparation of the guide involved a thorough examination of the literature available both in Ireland and abroad along with a series of group consultations and one-to-one interviews conducted with selected representatives from various stakeholder organisations. These included members of an Irish lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth group, people with a particular expertise and interest in the area of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues and educational practitioners and policy-makers from both the formal and non-formal education sectors. These consultations provided information on the lived experience of young lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people. They also identified opportunities for change and provided ideas and actions for making educational environments inclusive of all learners. Direct quotes from participants in the group consultations are included in the document where appropriate in order to bring a more personal perspective to the issues and to ground the guide in the lived experience of real people.

1.2 Who is the Resource Guide For?

The resource guide is for use within a range of formal and non-formal educational settings. Formal and non-formal education settings are generally distinguished from each other by their structures and programmes. Traditionally, formal education has been associated with first, second and third-level education and some vocational training. On the other hand, non-formal education is often used to describe a range of educational programmes outside of these mainstream structures such as those provided through developmental youth work and community-based education initiatives.

The resource guide is for the teacher who wants to work within her/his classroom; it is for the board of management who wants to work for inclusion; it is for a staff group who wants to develop a short-term development plan for the school. It is for the youth worker who wants to develop her or his understanding and find a way to tackle homophobic attitudes; it is for the community education worker who wants to bring the issue of inclusion to the attention of the management body of the local school or youth club.

In short, the resource guide is for anyone who has the interest in and capacity to make a difference to the lives and experience of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners in all educational settings. It is offered as both an education tool and an action tool:

- **AS AN EDUCATION TOOL** it can help raise awareness about the needs of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners as participants in various educational settings. It also outlines supports and opportunities for change that currently exist.

- **AS AN ACTION TOOL** it proposes an organisational proofing framework for action towards inclusion and offers a number of guidelines that can be used by key players within a variety of educational settings.

1.3 How to use the Resource Guide

The resource guide is made up of three booklets and two pullout leaflets. This booklet, 'Understanding The Issues', can be used by anyone as a source of information on the issues facing young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners and on the relevant legislative and policy frameworks governing current educational provision in Ireland. The two separate 'How To' booklets for formal and non-formal education settings are devised for a broad range of people and present an organisational proofing framework that includes a number of areas for action.

The consultative process associated with the production of the guide led to two key ideas being identified that informed the organisational proofing framework. Firstly, it was clear from the young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners that they had very specific recommendations in relation to action. They clearly associated these recommendations with specific needs such as feeling safe within school or youth club settings, the desire for school subjects to reflect their experience and for procedures that would combat homophobic bullying. Secondly, the consultation process with key personnel from a range of formal and non-formal educational settings highlighted the need for the guide to reflect the workplace realities of potential users. This means that it employs a language that is meaningful and provides guidelines and examples that are relevant. The resource guide utilises an organisational proofing framework based around Four **P's (4P's)**.

The 4P's offer an organisational proofing framework that can help identify the areas where specific action may be taken to promote inclusion.

While the 4P's framework remains core to both the formal and non-formal 'How To' guides, some of the specific guidelines may differ. Both guides seek to enable users to reflect on their situation and to choose the most appropriates series of actions for their setting. A resource list of useful websites and contacts is also provided.

1.4 Key Terms

Language is important when dealing with people's experience. It is always important to use appropriate language and to be aware that the meaning of words can change over time. In the text of this document, some words are repeatedly used to identify groupings of people or processes. In the resource guide the specific meanings embedded in these terms are as follows:

- The abbreviation **LGBT(s)** stands for **lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender person(s)**. While useful as a text abbreviation, it should always be remembered that LGBT(s) is a short-hand reference for an individual person or for the collective lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Where YLGBT(s) is used it refers to a young lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person(s).

- **'Coming out'** describes either the internal process through which a person comes to identify her/himself as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or the process of informing somebody else that s/he is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

- The terms **formal and non-formal education settings** are used throughout this guide. In the context of this document, the term 'formal education' generally refers to secondary school settings but can also be inclusive of other learning centres such as Youthreach Centres. The term 'non-formal' refers to developmental youth work and community-based educational initiatives.

- The term **Young Learner** generally refers to any young person between the ages of 12-18 years who is involved in any educational activity within a school/learning centre, developmental youth work setting or community-based education initiative.

There is also a growing body of internationally accepted terms that have particular resonance in relation to LGBT issues. '*Language Matters: A Glossary of Terms*' is provided for users to familiarise themselves with some of the definitions before reading further.

2

Being a young lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender learner

This section provides a general introduction to the issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Irish society. It specifically describes how young LGBT learners are excluded and discriminated against in the learning environment and the consequent effects on the their health and well-being[1].

[1] *There exists a large body of international research on the issues discussed in this section. Where possible all material presented is derived from the most relevant and recent Irish or UK sources.*

2.1 Introduction

Sexual orientation is a characteristic of all human beings that describes to whom they are sexually or emotionally attracted. Heterosexuals are men or women who are attracted to the opposite sex, homosexuals (lesbians and gays) are women or men who are attracted to the same sex and bisexuals are those who are attracted to both sexes.

Gender identity is a related but different concept to sexual orientation. It describes how people relate to the socially constructed notions of gender i.e. to femininity and to masculinity. Men have been traditionally assigned a masculine gender role in society and women assigned a feminine one. However, it is arguable that everyone possesses a degree of what is considered to be masculinity and femininity and some people locate themselves either in between or outside of these traditional gender categories altogether. A **transgender person** does not identify with the traditional gender role assigned to him or her by society based on his or her biological sex. A trans person, therefore, may identify with the opposite gender, or with both genders or with neither. It includes such diverse categories as transvestism, transexualism and other traits and behaviours not typically associated with one's assigned gender.

It is still unclear how many people in society identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Kinsey's much-disputed figure of 10% from the 1940s and 1950s remains the most widely quoted statistic for lesbians and gays[2]. More recent studies have put this figure at somewhere between 1% and 10% in relation to LGB identity, but this proportion triples when actual homosexual experiences are taken into account[3]. It does not, moreover, include trans people who are estimated by the Gender Trust to be around 1 in 10,000[4]. At any rate it is fair to say that a significant proportion of the population either identify as LGBT or have had LGBT experiences.

Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender people (LGBTs) all have distinct and separate identities and experiences in the world. Each has a multiple identity linked not only to her/his diversity as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person, but also to the broad variety of experiences associated with her/his gender, ethnicity, class, age, abilities, and so forth. In that sense, the LGBT community is not an homogenous group and some can experience cumulative disadvantage. For instance, a lesbian who comes from the Travelling Community can experience discrimination on three different fronts - as a lesbian, as a woman and as a Traveller.

While these differences must be recognised and respected, it must also be acknowledged that LGBT people have historically and more-or-less universally experienced denial, hatred and discrimination in their lives as LGBTs[5]. The GLEN/Nexus Research study provides ample evidence of this in the Irish context and demonstrates how discrimination contributes to a higher rate of poverty and exclusion for lesbians and gay men[6]. For instance, the report states that one in ten respondents experienced discrimination in the provision of accommodation due to their sexual orientation and two-fifths had been threatened with violence because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay. In addition, many respondents showed signs of psychological distress and three-fifths had emigrated at some point with most stating that their sexual orientation was a key factor in that decision.

2 *Kinsey et al (1948); Kinsey et al (1953).*

3 *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003), referring to Spira et al (1993), Johnson et al (1994), Laumann et al (1994) and Schubotz et al (2002). The ShOut Report is probably the most comprehensive research study on young LGBT people yet carried out on this island and is frequently referenced in this document.*

4 *Quoted in the ShOut Report (NI, 2003).*

5 *Amnesty International (2004).*

6 *GLEN/Nexus Research (Combat Poverty Agency, 1995).*

Although the GLEN/Nexus report and most earlier studies do not explicitly include transgender people, it is generally recognised nowadays that the patterns of discrimination and abuse facing transgender men and women are similar and closely connected to those experienced by LGB people. Indeed, much of the literature reports that transgender people experience an even higher degree of exclusion than lesbians, gays or bisexuals.

Anti-LGBT beliefs are embedded internally in individual attitudes and behaviours and are reflected externally in the policies and practices of public institutions – in families, in schools, in social organisations, and in state bodies. **Heterosexism** is the term used to describe "the belief and practice that heterosexuality is the only natural form of sexuality"[8]. This assumption underlines most individual and institutional approaches to sexual orientation and gender identity. Heterosexism contributes to invisibility, denial and discrimination for LGBT people.

Homophobia is a commonly used term to define the hatred and fear of LGBT people that is prevalent in society. It contributes to widespread hostility towards, and harassment and assault of, LGBT people. The ShOut Report states that "*studies indicate that homophobic harassment and assault is common and homicides are typically very brutal and involve much more violence than is required simply to kill the victim*"[9]. Furthermore, an LGBT person can internalise homophobia as a result of being exposed to it from an early age and one study found that 10% of the young men interviewed felt that realising they were gay was the first negative thing they could remember[10].

It is important to reiterate that, while the LGBT community is a diverse grouping, all lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people may experience discrimination, rejection and victimisation as LGBT people and can express higher rates of anxiety, depression, self-harming and suicidal behaviour as a result[12].

> "Homophobia is so common it is seen as been 'normal'"
>
> YOUNG LGBT PERSON[11]

2.2 Issues Facing Young LGBT Learners

Most people are aware of their sexual identity from an early age. In the case of young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (YLGBTs), most already recognise their sexual orientation/gender identity by the age of 13 to 15 years, although a lengthy period may elapse before the young person talks to someone else about it[13]. This pattern is reflected in the ShOut Report from Northern Ireland, where 52% of informants realised that they were LGBT by the age of 13 years, but over a quarter (28%) did not reveal their sexual identity to others before they were 18 years old[14].

7 *Amnesty International (2004).*

8 *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003), quoting from Cooper D (1994)* Sexing the City: Lesbian and Gay Politics Within the Activist State *Rivers Oram Press, London.*

9 *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003).*

10 *Hind (PACE, London, 2004), quoting from Warwick I, Douglas N & Aggleton P (2001)* HIV Prevention: What Young Gay and Bisexual Men Say is Needed. *Institute of Education, London.*

11 *Quotes taken from contributors to group consultations organised in preparation for this guide.*

12 *Hind (PACE, London, 2004).*

13 *Savin-Williams (US, 1990).*

14 *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003); see also BeLonG To documentation (Dublin) quoting recent research from PACE Youth Work Service (London) www.belongto.org; also data from US website www.advocatesforyouth.org*

The very nature of the adolescent development phase and its role in the transition between childhood and adulthood means that the vulnerable questioning and 'coming out' processes are likely to occur predominantly during this time. This is compounded by the difficulty in revealing LGBT sexual/gender identity to others due to a fear of rejection or abuse. According to the ShOut Report just over a third of informants, all of whom were under 25 years of age at the time, were not 'out' to any family member nor to anyone in their school or college. Similarly, 42% of those in employment were not 'out' to any work colleagues, and almost half (48%) of those involved in youth organisations had not revealed their LGBT identity in that setting. It is important to note that LGBT issues are often pertinent in school or youth settings even though they may not necessarily arise in any overt way.

Most of the research studies of LGBT young people in Ireland and in the UK have been sporadic and small-scale in nature, but as a whole they clearly indicate that young LGBT people face many specific barriers in the healthy transition to adulthood and experience particular risks to their mental, emotional and physical health, safety and well-being. These barriers and risks give rise to certain recurrent issues for young LGBT people and it is important to recognise that these issues and their impacts derive from the exclusion and oppression of young LGBT people, rather than from the circumstances of actually being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

As a general rule, young LGBT people do not feel that school or youth organisations are safe spaces for them. The ShOut Report found that 80% of their respondents who attended youth organisations in Northern Ireland did not experience a positive attitude to sexual orientation[16], while MacManus reported that 73% of LGBT respondents in his study experienced problems in school because of their sexual orientation or gender identity[17].

A recent review of the literature[18] highlights that the recurrent issues for young LGBs (and, by extension, young transgender people) are:

- Invisibility
- Non-recognition of diversity
- Lack of relevant sex education and access to tailored sexual health services
- High number of suicide, drug abuse, self-harm and mental health issues
- Denial of human rights.

In a recent submission to the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention[19], The Dublin-based LGBT Community Youth Project, BeLonG To, listed the following issues as central to the concerns of the young LGBT people who access their service:

- Being bullied and victimised, particularly in school and in their local communities. The lack of peer support and fear of communicating this to family members
- Marginalisation in school and local communities
- Lack of inclusion of LGBT sexuality in existing school programmes, for example in Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Family rejection
- Poor self image as a consequence of negative societal attitudes to their sexual identity
- Drug and alcohol misuse, often as a coping mechanism for dealing with victimisation and marginalisation
- Internalised homophobia – due to their experiences of homophobia.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003).*

[17] *MacManus (UCD, 2004).*

[18] *Loudes (NIHRC, 2003).*

[19] *Barron (BeLonG To, 2005).*

Specifically in relation to school life, the GLEN/ Nexus Research study reported that 57% of their respondents (lesbians and gay men) experienced various problems in school, the vast majority of whom described such experiences as arising as a result of being lesbian or gay[20]. The problems included:

- Isolation
- Depression
- Poor self-esteem
- Harassment and bullying.

MacManus (2004) listed the following problems experienced by his LGBT respondents in school:

- Fighting
- Discrimination
- Verbal and physical bullying
- Homophobic bullying
- Name-calling
- Damage to property
- Alienation
- An unsafe school environment.

The young LGBT people consulted during the preparation of this guide identified the main issues for them in relation to school and youth organisations as:

- Physical safety
- Negative attitudes
- Fear of rejection
- The questioning and 'coming out' processes
- Silence, lack of support, isolation
- Visibility issues
- Myths and stereotypes.

In all, the pattern emerging from the sources cited above indicates that a number of factors profoundly affecting the lives and well-being of LGBT young people arise again and again, namely:

- **Visibility issues**
- **Silence**
- **Lack of physical and emotional safety**
- **Prejudice and discrimination**
- **Lack of support**
- **Internalised homophobia**
- **Lack of recognition of diversity within the young LGBT community**
- **Vulnerability during the questioning and 'coming out' phases.**

This list of factors clearly indicate why, as a general rule, LGBT young people feel that school or youth organisations do not constitute safe spaces for them.

These factors are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of the guide, particularly as they relate to educational settings.

[20] *GLEN/Nexus Research (CPA, 1995).*

VISIBILITY ISSUES

"*It is oppression through invisibility that best encapsulates the educational experiences of gay, lesbian or bisexual students, and indeed teachers, in Ireland*"[21].

Throughout the country young people spend much of their time sitting in classrooms and attending youth services but LGBT sexual identity remains largely unrecognised by teachers or youth workers. This invisibility primarily arises from the prevailing heterosexist assumption that everyone conforms to gender norms. It is reinforced by the relative powerlessness of young people in educational settings and occurs across every level - heterosexuality (of both students and staff) is assumed when school policies are being revised; when 'at risk' youth are being identified in youth services; when programmes or curricula are being developed and taught and when personal interactions occur within or without the classroom. Research recently published by the Centre for Educational Evaluation at Dublin City University (DCU) shows that almost one-third (31%) of teachers reported that their school had no policy on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and of those schools who had an RSE policy, only 37% included any reference to lesbian or gay issues[22].

Another Irish study found that only 2% of respondents reported that information on LGBT life such as books and posters was available in their school[23], while a major review of the education system concluded that lesbian and gay students are amongst **the most invisible people in Irish schools**[24]. An examination of the websites of the main national youth organisations in the Republic of Ireland shows scant recognition of the existence of LGBT young people on their pages.

The fact that so many young LGBT people are reluctant to disclose their LGBT sexual orientation/gender identity to others compounds their invisibility in educational settings. As a result many educational organisations conclude that LGBT issues are not pertinent to their work with young people. The recent DCU study highlighted for instance, that only half of teachers surveyed (51%) said that they were aware that lesbian or gay pupils ever attended their school and this proportion drops to just over a third (37%) for girls' single-sex schools[25].

Becoming visible as LGBT also has consequences for the young person. At worst, s/he may become the focus of ridicule or other forms of homophobic harassment and assault. The disturbance of heterosexist assumptions may lead to more subtle forms of discrimination too. For instance, young transgender people often experience difficulty in using bathrooms assigned to the gender that they do not identify with. Multi-occupancy changing facilities and bathrooms do not allow for the experience of a young transgender person in this regard. A further example is where a school may have a stated policy on the recognition of LGBT young people, but it may still be viewed as unacceptable for a student to bring a same-sex partner to the school graduation dance, since this might be considered to be 'flaunting' it publicly. In contrast to the invisibility of LGBTs that such a situation fosters, when a young LGBT person does 'come out' or is 'outed', she or he is often viewed henceforth only in terms of her or his sexual orientation. S/he becomes "the gay" and is only viewed in that context[26].

"Everyone is watching you"
"People notice you too much"

YOUNG LGBTs WHO ARE 'OUT' IN SCHOOL

[21] *Quote from Lodge & Lynch (2004), referring to Rose (1994), GLEN/Nexus (1995), Barron (1999), Foyle Friend (1999), Gay HIV Strategies/Nexus Research (2000), Gowran (2000) and O'Carroll & Szalacha (2000).*

[22] *Norman, Galvin and McNamara (DCU, 2006).*

[23] *MacManus (UCD, 2004).*

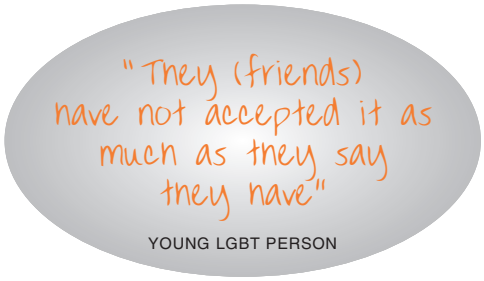
[24] *Lynch & Lodge (London, 2002).*

[25] *Norman, Galvin and McNamara (DCU, 2006).*

[26] *Information supplied during group consultations in preparation for this guide.*

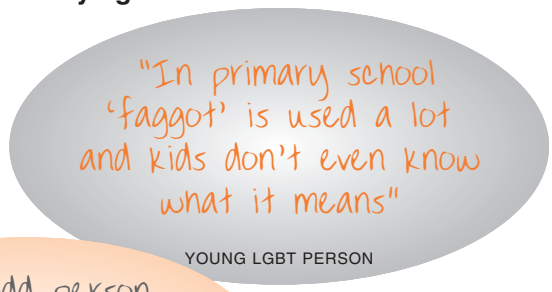
SILENCE

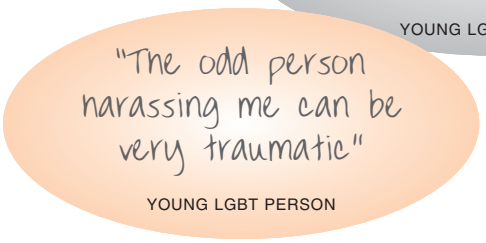
Apart from invisibility, the young LGBT learner also has to cope with silence when LGBT sexual orientation/gender identity issues arise. There is often a change of subject, an avoidance or an awkwardness around these issues. Teachers and youth workers often do not have information ready to hand, are unskilled in dealing with homophobic harassment or sexual confusion, and perhaps have unclear personal responses to diverse sexual identities themselves. Consequently, there can be a resistance to engaging with the issue.[27].



LACK OF PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY

All the research literature reports that homophobic remarks and even assaults are commonplace amongst young people. The ShOut Report from Northern Ireland indicates that a third of the LGBT students questioned had experienced **physical assault**, this proportion increasing to over half of transgender pupils. About two-thirds received **verbal abuse**[28]. Teachers and youth workers have been known to condone homophobic harassment of their students or even in some cases to themselves perpetrate similar behaviour[29]. The most recent survey of teachers in the Irish context carried out by DCU found that 79% had encountered homophobic verbal bullying of young people, while 16% were aware of incidents of homophobic physical bullying occurring in their school[30]. However, **it is telling that 90% of teachers in the DCU study stated that their school's anti-bullying policy did not include any reference to LGBT-related bullying**.





Young LGBT learners report that they try to avoid certain places such as particular corridors or playing areas, but when a member of staff passes comments that are denigratory of their sexual identity, or when attendance at insufficiently supervised events is compulsory, then they are rendered emotionally and physically even more vulnerable[31]. This lack of safety is compounded by the non-acknowledgement among those in authority of the seriousness of the use of the word 'gay' or 'lessie' as regular and casual **insults/taunts**[32]. A study of schools in Northamptonshire stated the following:

"*Students and teachers reported many instances of low-level homophobic bullying, usually involving name-calling, jokes and the routine use of terms such as 'gay' or 'poof' to describe anything that was not liked. This was seen by many [non-LGBT] students as not harmful or 'just a laugh'. Some teachers saw this as an unpleasant part of 'teen culture*"[33].

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003).*

[29] *MacManus (UCD thesis, 2004); also BeLonG To documentation www.belongto.org*

[30] *Norman, Galvin and McNamara (DCU, 2006).*

[31] *Information supplied during group consultations in preparation for this guide.*

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] *Drake et al (UK, 2003)*

The absence of LGBT references in anti-bullying policies, and the negativity towards LGBT sexualities inherent in the religious ethos of many schools are further factors contributing to the alienation of LGBT students.

Homophobic bullying can occur in classrooms, corridors, playing areas, bathrooms, and on the way to and from the educational setting. Those carrying out the bullying behaviour may conceal their actions by lying in wait at certain locations where individuals are likely to be isolated, or by stealing or damaging property belonging to their victims[34].

The recent DCU study on lesbian and gay issues in the school curriculum reported that the threat to the physical or emotional safety of a young LGBT learner is likely to be more pronounced in a single-sex male environment, with 25% of teachers reporting an awareness of instances in single-sex boys schools of physical bullying as a result of students' perceptions of homosexuality, compared with 17% in co-educational schools and 13% in single-sex girls schools. It is evident that boys are generally more in danger of physical assault than girls[35]. There is also a perception amongst LGBT people that trans people are more likely to experience harassment of all sorts than lesbians, gays or bisexuals[36]. It is worth noting also that homophobic bullying affects more than just those who are LGBT. It also isolates their friends and allies, and the threat of being labelled gay can haunt anyone who is seen to be 'different'[37]. Young men have been known to be bullied simply for having long hair.[38].

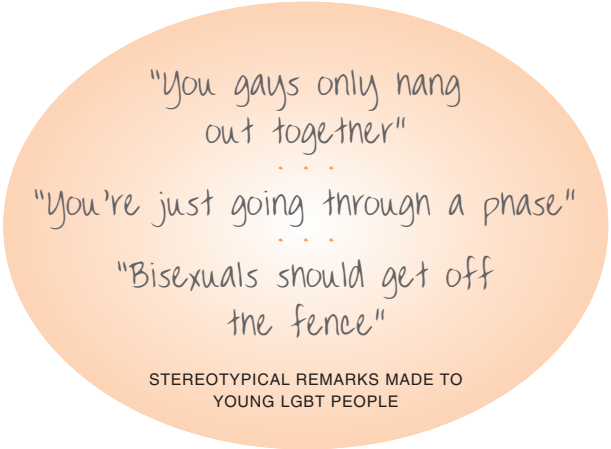
PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Casual homophobic remarks reportedly occur widely and generally go unchallenged either by peers or by adult personnel working in the educational environment. Anti-gay graffiti is commonplace everywhere in educational settings – written over posters, on cloakroom walls, on desks and on books[39].

Prejudicial **myths** abound in relation to LGBT people. **Stereotypes** are rife. For instance, there is a common association made in many people's minds between gay men and paedophilia, although **no such link has actually been found to exist**[40]. Half of the respondents in MacManus's study reported that a negative image of LGBT people was generally portrayed in their school[41]. It is noteworthy that the few respondents who reported a good image of LGBT people in their school stated that lesbian and gay speakers had been invited to address students.

These myths feed through into attitudes towards LGBT young people that are often expressed through overt hostility, avoidance, and outright discrimination. For example, certain behaviours between same-sex individuals may be forbidden at youth discos while similar behaviours between members of opposite sexs may be permitted.

As has already been mentioned, the strength of homophobic hatred is such that even those who simply look like the stereotypical 'gay' or 'lessie' can be subject to bullying and isolation.



STEREOTYPICAL REMARKS MADE TO YOUNG LGBT PEOPLE

[34] *Kosciw (New York, 2004). Also information supplied during consultations in preparation for this guide.*

[35] *Norman, Galvin and McNamara (DCU, 2006).*

[36] *Kosciw (New York, 2004).*

[37] *Norman (DCU, 2004), quoting from Kehily (2001).*

[38] *Drake et al (UK, 2003).*

[39] *Information supplied during group consultations in preparation for this guide.*

[40] *Amnesty International (2004).*

[41] *MacManus (UCD, 2004).*

LACK OF SUPPORT

Young LGBT learners frequently have **no role models**. LGBT teachers tend not to disclose their sexual orientation for fear of losing their jobs[42]. There is generally no pro-active recognition of LGBT issues from teachers or instructors or management. The ShOut Report states that only 4% of respondents claimed to have received any information or support on issues relating to sexual orientation in school. The corresponding figure for youth organisations was 17%[43]. When young LGBT learners need support with regard to anti-gay bullying or dealing with non-accepting parents or sorting through sexual confusion, those in authority are ill-prepared to provide it. The recent DCU study reported that a large proportion of teachers (41%) who had encountered verbal or physical bullying of a homophobic nature found it more difficult to deal with than other types of bullying. When asked to explain this difficulty, teachers reported that it is caused by "*a desire to be sensitive to the victim and a fear of the possible reaction from parents, other staff and students if they are seen to take the side of the student who is perceived to be lesbian or gay*"[44]. As a result young people are often reluctant to seek help thus reinforcing their sense of isolation and lack of support. The ShOut Report states that of those young LGBT people who had been bullied or had experienced negative attitudes in school because of their sexual orientation, only 13% sought support from school personnel. Most relied for their information on the internet (50%), books or magazines (36%), LGBT groups (22%) or the media generally (21%)[45]. Apart from the LGBT groups, these are all noticeably impersonal resources.

"Some teachers are too casual in their response to 'outing' - They say 'You're just going through a phase'"

YOUNG LGBT PERSON

"There is a fear of being tarred with the same brush if you publicly support an young LGBT person"

TEACHER

QUESTIONING AND 'COMING OUT'

Documentation produced by BeLonG To and from elsewhere[46] indicate that young people who are questioning their sexuality or who feel that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender experience huge fears of rejection especially in relation to their family or carers. The issue of 'coming out' therefore, becomes a very demanding one. To quote from BeLonG To: "*For the majority of LGBT people, 'coming out' to family is cited as the most difficult part of the 'coming out' process*"[47]. Those who do not 'come out' begin to live a double-life by suppressing their sexual orientation from their family or carers, which in itself causes immense stress for the young person.

"When you're 'coming out' it fills your mind and it's hard to work"

"...and schools have no support for those 'coming out'"

YOUNG LGBT PEOPLE

[42] *Gowran (UCD thesis, 2000).*

[43] *The ShOut Report (2003).*

[44] *Norman, Galvin and McNamara (DCU, 2006), page 72.*

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] *www.belongto.org; also Loudes (NI, 2003).*

[47] *Ibid.*

INTERNALISED HOMOPHOBIA

Young LGBT people are vulnerable to adopting negative attitudes towards themselves and other LGBT young people as a result of being exposed to and internalising homophobia. BeLonG To has identified this issue as a significant one causing anxiety and distress for young LGBT people.

LACK OF RECOGNITION OF DIVERSITY

The diversity of identities and experiences of young LGBT people is often overlooked. For instance, research indicates that young lesbians and bisexual women feel even more marginalised and isolated than males[48], a fact that is mirrored by the relative invisibility of lesbians within the gay community. This pattern can be reasonably attributed to dominant gender roles more than to homophobia. Similarly, surveys among LGBT youth in the US have revealed that young females are more likely to be harassed because of their gender, while young males and transgender people report more frequent verbal and physical harassment related to their sexual orientation and their gender expression[49]. The study indicates that the negative experiences of transgender young people relate to gender, gender expression and sexual orientation, those of lesbians and bisexual women relate to gender and sexual orientation, and those of youth of colour relate to race/ethnicity and sexual orientation. It concludes that the "*results regarding the intersections of sexual orientation, gender, gender expression and race/ethnicity highlight the importance of understanding the diversity in experiences of LGBT youth*".[50].

2.3 Impact on Young LGBT Learners

All of the research previously cited reports that the discrimination, marginalisation and hostility towards young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people can have major impacts on their health and well-being. These effects include:

- **Isolation**
- **Emotional ill-health & physical ill-health**
- **Lowered educational attainment.**

ISOLATION

Whether or not they are 'out', young LGBT learners tend to feel or to actually become socially and emotionally isolated largely as a result of the factors outlined above - the general invisibility of LGBT issues, the **silence** surrounding them, the casually accepted denigration and the lack of support available. To compound this, their friends may retreat from contact or themselves be subject to isolation or abuse following disclosure of LGBT sexuality[51]. The ShOut Report noted that most (70%) of their respondents indicated that they had experienced homophobic attitudes from family members and as a result almost half (45%) felt compelled to leave the family home[52].

"People distance themselves from you"

YOUNG LGBT PERSON

[48] *Loudes (NIHRC, 2003).*

[49] *Kosciw (New York, 2004).*

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] *Information supplied during group consultations in preparation for this guide. Also BeLonG To documentation.*

[52] *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003).*

EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL ILL-HEALTH

Young LGBT learners often live in a constant state of **fear and anxiety** – that they may be LGBT in the first place, that their parents/ friends/teachers may find out, that they will be picked on by their peers, that they will not be supported by their friends/tutors/educational establishment. The biggest fear of all is that of **rejection** by significant others in their lives.

"You want to be 'out' but you fear rejection"

YOUNG LGBT PERSON

Not surprisingly given the circumstances, young LGBT people show higher levels of emotional distress than heterosexual young people. They may experience a range of difficulties in 'coming out' to themselves or to other important people in their lives such as parents or friends. If already 'out', they are likely to have to deal with outright hostility from peers and indifference at best from educational institutions. As a consequence, they are more subject to **depression and low self-esteem**. Among other findings, the ShOut Report revealed that one-quarter of respondents said they had been medicated for depression, a quarter had experienced self-harm, a third had misused alcohol, and a fifth had experienced an eating disorder[53]. Three out of ten of these young people had attempted **suicide**[54]. In nearly all cases, the study found that transgender young people are at an even higher risk of suicide than lesbians, gays or bisexuals.

A recent document published by the National Suicide Research Foundation echoes these findings by reporting that teenagers who harmed themselves were four times more likely to have worries about sexuality than those who had not[55]. It is not surprising, therefore, **that young LGBT people are thought to account for 30% - almost a third – of all completed youth suicides**[56].

The particular vulnerability of LGBT youth in Ireland has been acknowledged in the national strategy for suicide prevention that proposes actions to develop services, supports and information/education resources to improve mental health among LGB youth[57].

Again, it is important to reiterate that this increased vulnerability of LGBT young people is due to victimisation, stigmatisation and lack of support and not as a result of being LGBT in itself[58].

"You begin to hate yourself"

YOUNG LGBT PERSON

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] *Ibid.*

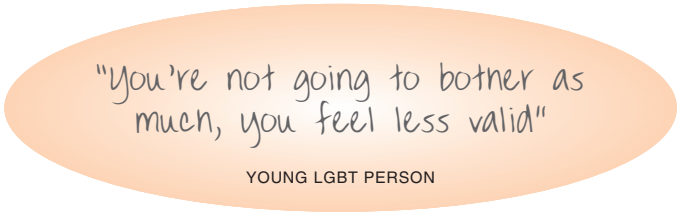
[55] *Sullivan et al (Cork, 2004).*

[56] *Hind (London, 2004) quoting from Warwick I & Douglas N (2001)* Safe for All – A Best Practice Guide to Prevent Homophobic Bullying in Secondary Schools. *Institute of Education, London.*

[57] *Health Service Executive, National Suicide Review Group, Dept. of Health & Children (2005)* Reach Out: National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention *2005-2014. HSE.*

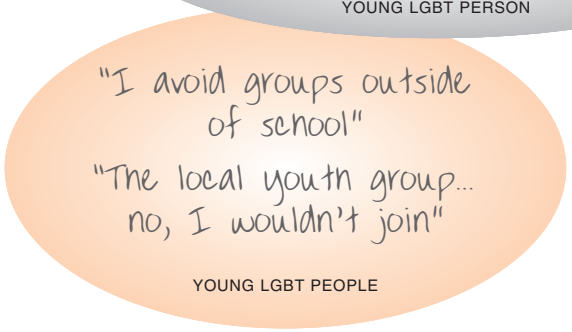
[58] *Barron (2005); Bontempo, D. and D'Augelli (2002).*

LOWERED EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



Research has shown that young LGBT learners may exhibit lower educational attainment than other groups. This is reflected through **earlier school leaving, poorer concentration,** and **higher levels of truancy and switching schools**[59]. For instance, a third of respondents in the ShOut Report claimed they had achieved lower results, a quarter had been truant at some stage, 15% had dropped out of school and one-tenth had changed schools, all because of problems that arose in relation to their sexual orientation or gender expression[60]. Similarly, MacManus reported that 42% of his respondents claimed that homophobia impacted negatively on their studies through "*isolation, lack of concentration, discrimination, skipping school to avoid bullying, feelings of alienation and lack of care, general difficulties in studying, falling behind at schoolwork and distraction caused by homophobic insults*"[61].

Furthermore, in order to avoid exposure or hostility some young LGBT people are reluctant to partake in extra-curricular activities and may stay away from further educational or other opportunities that may be otherwise available[62]. It has been noted that there is a perception among young LGBT people that they will not be welcomed by youth organisations generally and consequently that they are less likely to attend youth work activities[63].



[59] *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003); Kosciw (New York, 2004); MacManus (UCD, 2004).*

[60] *The ShOut Report (NI, 2003).*

[61] *MacManus (UCD, 2004).*

[62] *Information supplied during group consultations in preparation for this guide.*

[63] *Rose (Dublin, 1997).*

3

Including young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender learners

The previous section describes some of the processes inhibiting young LGBT people from participating equally in the learning environment. The present section outlines the consequent needs of young LGBT people in educational settings together with the barriers to and the opportunities for change that may exist in those settings. This is followed by a brief guide to national legislation and public policy in the formal and non-formal education sectors, together with a listing of relevant key supports and providers. Reference is made to aspects of the legislation, policy or supports that have a direct bearing on equality in relation to LGBT issues. The list is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive.

3.1 Needs of Young LGBT Learners

"How do you respond appropriately? ... I don't want to make it worse for the child"

TEACHER

"we need a recognition of the importance of 'coming out', of exposing this aspect of our lives to a teacher or youth worker, and we need reassurance back"

YOUNG LGBT PERSON

As has already been emphasised, young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have the same basic requirements for their health and well-being as other young people. All need to feel safe and secure in the learning environment and to have their identities recognised, protected and celebrated by their peers and by the organisations they have contact with. In this task it is just as important to protect and promote the health and well-being of all young learners as it is to remove any risks from their lives[64].

In this context, it is inclusive, holistic policies that promote equality in a broad sense, rather than a specific 'gay' policy as such, that is usually favoured by young LGBT people[65]. They envisage that such policies and procedures would name LGBT issues among others within a broad framework designed to create a safer environment for all young people.

Young learners who may be LGBT have the following needs from those who work in the educational sector:

- **Support and reassurance for those who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.**
- **Support and reassurance for those who are in the process of 'coming out'.**
- **Support and reassurance around disclosing LGBT identity to peers, friends, family, teaching staff, youth workers, and others.**
- **Support in accessing information and contact with other young LGBT people.**
- **Protection from prejudice and stereotyping.**
- **Protection from anti-LGBT bullying and harassment.**
- **To have their LGBT identity recognised, validated and normalised in educational establishments and learning activities.**

[64] *Hind (PACE, London, 2004).*

[65] *Redmond (Dublin, undated); MacManus (2004); BeLonG To documentation; and also from information supplied during group consultations in preparation for this guide.*

Young LGBT people have made the following recommendations for those who work in educational settings on how to create safer learning environments for them[66]:

- Try to understand the issues and language relating to LGBT identities by undertaking awareness and guidance training.
- Do not assume everyone is heterosexual or that everyone's parents are heterosexual.
- Do not make assumptions around gender identity.
- Try to avoid equating homosexuality only with sexual behaviour – those who identify as LGBT have friendships with one another too.
- Be sensitive to young people's feelings –take young people seriously, don't make jokes, have an open mind, don't suggest that "it's just a phase".
- Take care with regard to religious issues – religion can be used to promote bigotry and to excuse discrimination. Emphasise the concept of rights.
- Show LGBT issues in a positive light and not always as problems.
- Address sexual orientation/gender identity in relationships and sex education programmes - refer to the fact that some people experience attraction to those of their own sex.
- Provide more information on safer sex.
- Address anti-gay or anti-trans behaviour – name-calling, bullying and violence. Be aware that gay slagging is the most common put-down among young people, and actively respond in support of young LGBT people. Introduce tougher anti-bullying policies and include specific references to LGBT bullying. Increase supervision of extra-curricular activities.
- The questioning and 'coming out' processes are difficult and brave – treat them as such. Provide more information on these issues.
- Include information about same-sex relationships in material that is distributed to everyone so that people do not have to identify themselves as lesbian/gay/transgender before getting information that is appropriate to them.
- Be aware that discussion of sexual identity issues may result in anti-LGBT sentiment being expressed and be prepared for this.
- Make it easier for young people who identify as LGBT to find one another, and to find other forms of support through help lines or dedicated groups.
- Include LGBT issues on educational modules for young people.
- Consider the possibility of including representatives from the LGBT community when developing a list of speakers to address staff or young people on aspects of equality.
- Resource student councils and peer trainers to deal with LGBT issues.
- Appoint a trained and trusted youth worker/teacher specifically for LGBT youth.

"Always assume there are LGBTs in the group"

"One male teacher heard someone call someone else 'queer', so he spent the whole class on the issue of sexuality"

YOUNG LGBT PERSON

[66] *Adapted from MacManus (2004); BeLonG To documentation; and information provided during group consultations in preparation for this guide.*

3.2 Barriers to Change

A range of barriers have been identified that may hinder change conducive to a more inclusive environment for young LGBT learners[67]:

- A **lack of training** among staff and education personnel to deal with issues relating to LGBT identities. Norman reported that 92% of teachers in his study identified staff inexperience as a hindrance to positive developments in this area.

- A **lack of formal policies and procedures** to bring about change. The recent DCU study showed that 90% of teachers stated that their school's anti-bullying policy did not include any reference to lesbian and gay related bullying. 48% of teachers indicated that their school did not have a policy on confidentiality, and of those who did, only 21% included guidelines for responding to lesbian and gay issues. Only 36% of teachers reported that their school had a policy on equal opportunities, with only 20% of those who had a policy including any reference to lesbian and gay issues[68].

- Personal and institutional **homophobia** has a major impact on whether policies, procedures, programmes or physical environments receive the attention they require to make them safe and positive for young LGBT learners.

- A **resistance** to developing accessible and appropriate services for young LGBT people and to funding targeted services due to a lack of serious consideration of LGBT issues.

- A **fear of a negative reaction** from other educational stakeholders. The DCU study reported that 69% of teachers cited a fear of parental disapproval if they were to attempt to deal with this issue. Many also feared pupils' disapproval (54%), teaching colleagues' disapproval (47%), board of management disapproval (39%) or schools' trustees/patron disapproval (38%)[69].

- A **fear of association**. If staff/volunteers are seen to act on behalf of young LGBT learners they fear that they themselves will be labelled and may incur the same homophobic attitudes and treatment as LGBT people experience.

- A **lack of organisational clarity on obligations** in relation to confidentiality and consent around issues of sexual orientation/ gender identity.

- Within some educational settings there is a resistance, particularly from those who carry the **religious authority** - school chaplain, local parish priest, minister or rabbi - to addressing the issue of sexual orientation in a more proactive way. This can obviously occur where the religious ethos of the organisation is openly antagonistic to LGBT people.

- Other barriers include the **lack of information** and the high degree of **invisibility** associated with LGBT issues.

[67] *From Nexus Research/Gay HIV Strategies (Dublin, 1999); Norman (2004); and information supplied during group consultations in preparation for this guide.*

[68] *Norman, Galvin and McNamara (DCU, 2006).*

[69] *Norman, Galvin and McNamara (DCU, 2006).*

3.3 Existing Opportunities for Change

The barriers to change outlined in the previous section reflect the real constraints many people work with in their individual setting. It is important that these are openly addressed. In addition, relevant legislation, policies, structures and models of practice can be utilised to develop opportunities for change within the formal and non-formal education sectors. These include the following:

- The **School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI)** of the Department of Education and Science.
- The **Social Personal & Health Education (SPHE)/Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)** programmes on relationship and sex education for school students.
- The model of the **Whole School** programme from the UK, and of the **Safe School** programme from the US.
- Models of **equality-proofing toolkits and policies** in relation to young LGBT learners from Schools Out! and the National Union of Teachers in the UK, and from the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network and Advocates for Youth in the United States.
- Dedicated **LGBT support organisations**, especially those that have developed youth or education-related initiatives. These include BeLonG To, Parents Support, The Gay Men's Health Project (HSE), L.Inc, Outhouse, The Gay Community Development Co. Ltd, Dundalk OUTcomers, the LGBT support groups within the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the Union of Secondary Students, among others.
- The work of the Equality Authority in promoting the concept of the **inclusive school** under the aegis of the Equal Status Acts and the Employment Equality Act.
- Aspects of the **National Youth Work Development Plan** that relate to equality.
- The inclusion of modules addressing LGBT issues within the **professional training framework** of those who work with young learners.

The accompanying 'How To' booklets highlight practice and lessons from many of these developments that are key to the creation of more inclusive learning environments for young LGBT learners.

Users should also note that where the experience of young LGBT learners has improved, some particular factors have been noted to be supportive:

- The presence of **openly LGBT teachers/ youth leaders** within the staff can provide positive role models and thus have a direct impact on the experience of young LGBT learners.
- When there is a **history of people 'coming out'** in an establishment, there tends to be a positive cascading-type flow of others following suit.
- The open presence of **young LGBT learners** in a supportive climate has had a positive effect on the development of more open attitudes generally among their peers.

3.4 Relevant Legislation and Public Policy

While equality is a fundamental principle underpinning Irish society and the provision of education in the country, there has in recent times been a growing concern with inequality, poverty and social exclusion. As a result there have been developments in the legislative frameworks and in national public policy to promote equality and social inclusion objectives, particularly in relation to education. These policies and frameworks, while not necessarily targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individuals or groups explicitly, do provide a backdrop against which progress towards the inclusion of young LGBT learners can be framed. This section is divided into three sub-sections to outline some of the key developments: the first sub-section addresses **legislation**, the second examines **educational and other relevant policy initiatives** and the third focuses on key **support structures**.

LEGISLATION

General Equality Legislation

In recent years, a significant amount of equality and anti-discrimination legislation has been enacted. The Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 prohibit discrimination in relation to employment, including the employment of teachers. The Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004 prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services and in provision by educational establishments. The Equal Status Acts also:

- **Promote equality of opportunity**
- **Prohibit discrimination on nine specific grounds including sexual orientation (the other grounds are gender, age, disability, marital status, family status, religion, race, and membership of the Traveller community)**
- **Prohibit harassment on the discriminatory grounds and prohibit sexual harassment**
- **Allow for positive action**

Specifically in relation to education, the Acts declare that an educational establishment shall not discriminate in relation to:

- The admission or the terms or conditions of admission
- The access of any student to any course, facility or benefit
- Any other term or condition of participation The expulsion of a student or other sanction.

There are exemptions allowed, however. The exemption that is most relevant to LGBT learners relates to the protection of the religious ethos of the school.

The **Equality Authority (EA)** has a broad mandate under the Equal Status Acts to combat discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in the areas covered by the Acts. By identifying education and equality as a priority theme in its strategic plan (2003-2005) the Equality Authority acknowledged the centrality of education provision to the quality of life of people within the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation. The inclusive school is identified as the key concept that underpins the work of the EA in this area:

"*The inclusive school respects, values and accommodates diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation. It makes reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities and seeks positive experiences, a sense of belonging and positive outcomes for all students across the nine grounds. Outcomes include access, participation, personal development and achieving education credentials. The inclusive school also supports participation in decision making by a diversity of pupils. It has a similar concern for and focus on diversity among staff. Equality and education legislation usefully underpin and advance this goal of the inclusive school*"[70].

Education and Youth Work Legislation

The Education Act (1998) states that schools, given the resources available, must undertake to ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with special needs, are identified and provided for; promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students in consultation with parents and have an admissions policy which provides for maximum accessibility. Further to this, patrons of schools are obliged to appoint, where practicable, a Board of Management that has a range of duties including publishing a school plan and an admissions policy.

The Education (Welfare) Act (2000) is primarily concerned with school attendance and non-attendance. Among the main provisions of the Act, relevant to this resource guide, are:

- Raising the minimum school leaving age from 15 to 16 years (or to the completion of three years of post-primary education, whichever is the later).
- Establishing a National Educational Welfare Board to develop, co-ordinate and implement school attendance policy so as to ensure that every child in the State attends a recognised school or otherwise receives an appropriate education. Education Welfare Officers are charged with encouraging regular school attendance and developing strategies to reduce absenteeism and early school leaving. The Act emphasises the importance of both identifying cases where a child is experiencing difficulties in school attendance and intervening at an early stage to address the problem.

The purpose of the **Youth Work Act (2001)** is to provide a legal framework for the provision of youth work programmes and services by the Department of Education and Science and the Vocational Education Committees (VECs). Youth work is defined in the Act as "*a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training, and b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations*"[71].

This definition encapsulates several of the features that have come to be widely accepted among youth work policy-makers and practitioners in Ireland – the developmental and educational nature of the work, the fact that it rests on the voluntary participation of young people and that it is largely provided by voluntary organisations. The Act prioritises the development of youth work services for young people between the ages of 10-21yrs, and particular regard is given to those who are socially and/or economically disadvantaged.

[70] *Lodge & Lynch (Dublin, 2004).*

[71] *Department of Education Website, www.education.ie*

The National Youth Work Advisory Committee was established in April 2002. Among other things, this committee advises the Minister on the implementation of the Act. Under the provisions of the Act, the VECs have been given statutory responsibilities for the development of youth work in their area. Together, the Youth Work Act and the National Youth Work Development Plan provide the main legislative and policy contexts shaping the development of youth work at national and local level at the present time.

EDUCATION AND OTHER RELEVANT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Education Policy

In Ireland, the development of education policy is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science. In the White Paper, '**Charting Our Education Future**' (1995) the government set out its policy in relation to education provision. Five key principles underpin this policy: quality, equality, partnership, pluralism and accountability. The message in the White Paper in relation to equality is clear: "*The principle of equality is at the heart of the protection of individual rights and the promotion of community well-being. Where participation and achievement in the education system are impeded by physical, mental, economic or social factors, the State should seek to eliminate or compensate for the sources and consequences of educational disadvantage*"[72].

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is a new action plan within the Department of Education & Science that seeks to put in place an integrated, strategic approach to addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities.

The Higher Education Authority has through its action plan, **Achieving Equity of Access to Higher Education in Ireland, 2005-2007** set out a series of practical steps to create greater access to higher education for groups who have, to date, been under-represented in higher education. These actions include creating new and expanded routes for access and to create more diverse teaching and learning strategies and adequate financial support and resources for learners. Effective implementation of the plan will ensure that identified groups are enabled and encouraged to enter, and successfully participate in, higher education.

Other Relevant Policy Initiatives

The National Development Plan (2000-2006) has as one of several objectives to ensure that the "*socially excluded are fully enabled to participate in, contribute to and benefit from current and future social and economic development in the Republic*". The two regional operational programmes linked to the NDPcontain sub-programmes committed to addressing social exclusion. A new National Development Plan will cover the period 2007-2013.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) is a government strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion. NAPS was originally launched in 1997 but the current strategy, Building an Inclusive Society, was updated in 2002. The Equality Proofing Guidelines of NAPS explicitly includes sexual orientation. EU member states are also required to produce a national action plan against poverty and social exclusion. A new National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion is due to cover a two-year period from September 2006.

[72] Charting Our Future, *Education White Paper, Department of Education, 1995*

The National Children's Strategy was published in 2000 following extensive consultation with children and organisations and individuals providing care and support for children and young people. It offers a blueprint for improving the lives of all children especially those who experience disadvantage or have particular needs.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office was established under the Ombudsman for Children's Act (2002). The main purpose of the Ombudsman's role is to safeguard and promote the rights and interests of children and young people under the age of eighteen. The office operates under the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1992), especially Article 12 that upholds the rights of children and young people to have an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in matters affecting them. The fundamental and underlying principle of the Convention is that children and young people are citizens in their own right.

The National Youth Work Development Plan (2003 –2007) is the primary policy framework governing youth work in Ireland. Published by the Department of Education and Science (Youth Affairs) it acknowledges that the primary focus of youth work is the education of young people in non-formal settings. Among other things, the plan is rooted in a commitment to diversity and combating injustice and inequality. Further to this, the plan recognises that youth work provision has hitherto been inadequate for young LGBT people among others and recommends that a proactive approach should be adopted to the promotion of equality and inclusiveness within youth work. Specifically, it advocates that youth work organisations and VECs (in their preparation of Youth Work Development Plans) should be encouraged to use the categories identified in the Equal Status Acts as a template for the active promotion of equality within their areas of operation, and for the monitoring and evaluation of youth work programmes and services in their areas.

3.5 Key Supports in the Non-formal Education Sector

For the purposes of this resource guide, the non-formal education sector for young people is viewed as consisting primarily of two main strands of activity outside of the formal academic and vocational education systems. These are:

- The educational activities of the largely non-governmental voluntary youth work organisations, and
- The community-based educational activities developed through the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP).

YOUTH WORK ORGANISATIONS AND YOUTH PROGRAMMES

Developmental youth work typically engages young people by offering different kinds of programme opportunities including recreational, creative, justice, issue-based, and educational opportunities. The defining characteristic of developmental youth work is its *process* – the programme opportunities are regarded as a means to an end not an end in themselves. The process of developmental youth work is broadly based on the following values among others:

- A participatory approach that presumes the voluntary engagement of young people
- A relationship of mutual respect between adults and young people
- The welfare of young people as a priority
- Community-based
- Recognition of diversity
- Promotion of social responsibility.

Typically, youth work is managed by youth work personnel as sole providers, for example, in centre-based youth projects, youth information centres and youth clubs. However, youth work is increasingly conducted at the interface of, and within, other domains such as education, justice and social and health work. It is in the area of youth education work that the youth sector is most likely to interface with the activities of the community-based educational actions of the Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme.

The number, size and nature of youth work organisations that operate in Ireland represent a wide range and complex set of activities. At one end of the spectrum voluntary youth organisations are simply small groups of individuals who have come together for a common purpose. At the other end are bigger organisations that have a large number of staff and volunteers. Very many work closely with public bodies such as the health services, and some maintain a strong ethos based on religious values. Currently, the **City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB)** is the only statutory agency in the country that has responsibility for the development of youth services within its catchment area.

At national level the **National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)** is the primary representative and umbrella youth work body to which most youth organisations of national scope are affiliated. It is recognised as such by the Youth Work Act. In 2004, a total of 43 national youth organisations were full members of NYCI. It promotes the development of services for all young people and safeguards their interests and concerns. NYCI promotes the developmental and educational nature of youth work, and lists equality among its guiding principles by acknowledging that all young people are of equal value regardless of gender or sexual orientation among other attributes.

The bulk of youth work is implemented and co-ordinated on the ground by a few large organisations such as the Youth Work Ireland (formerly the National Youth Federation), Foróige and Catholic Youth Care. These organisations are supported, although not exclusively, by financial and other assistance from the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and Science, mainly through the VECs.

The **National Youth Health Programme** is a partnership operated by the NYCI with the Youth Affairs Section and the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Children. It has been in operation for over 10 years and is based in the NYCI offices. The Programme aims to provide a broad-based, flexible health promotion/education, support and training service to youth organisations and to all those working with young people in the education setting. This work is achieved through the development of programmes and interventions specifically for and with youth organisations throughout the country and the training and support of workers and volunteers implementing these programmes.

The **Special Projects for Disadvantaged Youth (SPY)** is a scheme of grants from the Youth Affairs section of the Department of Education and Science in respect of special out-of-school projects for disadvantaged young people. Grants are allocated to organisations and groups for specific projects that seek to address the needs of young people who are disadvantaged due to factors such as social isolation, drug/substance abuse or failure or non-existence of mainline youth services.

BeLonG To, the only youth project in the country with full-time youth workers dedicated to the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people, is funded through SPY. BeLonG To has more than 350 members and has established sub-groups catering specifically for 14-17 year olds and for young lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. Funding to BeLong To under SPY is administered by the City of Dublin Youth Services Board.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIAL INCLUSION PROGRAMME

The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) 2000-2006 is one of the programmes managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Pobal is an intermediary company established by the European Commission and the Irish Government to promote social inclusion, reconciliation and equality through integrated social and economic development within communities. It is a not-for-profit company with charitable status that manages a wide range of programmes on behalf of the Irish government and the EU. Pobal supports partnership approaches to decision-making in order to

engage communities in the development process at local level with a view to promoting co-ordination between communities, state agencies and other stakeholders. It encourages the piloting of new initiatives and is committed to contributing to policy development through the lessons learned from the programmes it manages.

The LDSIP is funded under the National Development Plan and its aim is to counter disadvantage and to promote equality and social inclusion. It is delivered by 38 Area Based Partnerships, 31 Community Partnerships and 2 Employment Pacts, and is designed around three distinct but inter-related measures, namely:

- Services for the Unemployed
- Community Development
- Community-Based Youth Initiatives (CBYI).

Education and youth development actions are predominantly located within the CBYI measure of the LDSIP. Under this measure Partnerships are encouraged and enabled to develop actions that target young people who are considered to be educationally disadvantaged, in addition to targeting key groups who interact with them such as parents, teachers and youth workers. The present guide has been developed by Pobal under the CBYI Measure of the LDSIP.

The following actions are a sample of those undertaken by Partnerships under the LDSIP.

- Homework clubs and supervised study
- Summer camps and after-school support
- Additional literacy/numeracy and language education
- Supplementary psychological services
- Small-scale grants to support young people to remain in third-level education
- Awareness training for teachers/educators who are dealing with educational inequality
- Awareness training and supports for intercultural and inclusive education
- Education access programmes to further and higher education
- Programmes to support retention and achievement, such as in-school mentoring, guidance, study supports, personal development and social development
- Transition programmes from primary to second-level education
- Training and capacity-building programmes for parents
- Outreach supports to early school leavers and detached youth
- Networking clusters of schools
- Research and policy development.

Under the CBYI measure an **equality in education** framework was developed both as an underpinning philosophical reference point for the work and also as an organising tool for action at local level. Pobal has defined the equality in education as follows: "*In the context of education, equality is achieved when economically and socially excluded individuals, groups and communities participate in, achieve in and benefit from education to equivalent levels as less excluded individuals, groups and communities across all levels and sectors in education without unnecessary hardship*"[73].

[73] *Pobal* Equality in Education, *2003*

The framework consists of strategies to achieve a) equality of opportunity, b) equality of treatment and c) equality of outcome. It enables Partnerships to locate their work with reference to mainstream education and in so doing to ascertain the contribution of their work to creating an inclusive and equal education system for all learners, but particularly for those who are not enabled within mainstream education to achieve to their fullest potential.

Each Partnership develops educational programmes that ultimately contribute to equality of outcome for young people coming from socio-economically disadvantaged areas and who therefore have an increased risk of being educationally disadvantaged. Some of these programmes operate in close collaboration with local schools and training centres, for example, homework clubs and access programmes, while others provide supportive opportunities outside of formal schooling such as social clubs, outreach activities and education programmes for parents. In this context, Pobal sees that it has a role in generating education and learning partnerships between the formal and non-formal education sectors in order to achieve the goal of educational inclusiveness and equality of outcome in educational achievement.

Many of the values of youth work are similar to those of the LDSIP and the CBYI measure. These values are underpinned by a commitment to equality, social inclusion and justice for young people in society. Furthermore, it is clear that the work of the CBYI measure is designed to create interfaces and linkages between the non-formal and formal education systems. This is essential if the objective of equal and inclusive education is to be realised for all learners but especially for those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, any form of exclusion or inequality.

3.6 Key Supports in the Formal Education Sector

The overall aim of second-level education is to build on the foundation of primary education, and to provide a comprehensive, high-quality learning environment which enables all students to live full lives appropriate to their stage of development and to realise their potential as individuals. It aims to prepare students for adult life and to help them proceed to further education or directly to employment. Second level education provision in Ireland is delivered by over 750 schools which can be subdivided into three groups, each reflecting a different form of management structure:

- *Vocational/Community Colleges* owned by local authorities and run by vocational education committees or authorities
- *Comprehensive/Community Schools* established by the State and owned by partnership boards of trustees
- *Secondary Schools* usually run by religious groups or organisations.

There are a limited number of fee-paying private secondary schools in Ireland. Since the introduction of the Education Act schools are now obliged to publish a school plan detailing their admissions and other key policies.

Second chance education and training for young people between the ages of 15-20 years is delivered through a national programme entitled **Youthreach**. The programme is directed at unemployed early school leavers and seeks to provide them with opportunities to identify possible options for themselves as well as opportunities for certification. The programme is delivered by a range of providers including, for example, the Department of Education and Science through the VECs, FÁS through Community Training Centres and jointly with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through 'Justice Workshops'.

The role of the **National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)** is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum and assessment for all levels of formal school education. In its on-going commitment to curriculum review this body plays a key role in shaping the content of the national curricula. It advises the Minister as to how curricula might be set out in terms of its aims and objectives, content and assessment processes as well as establishing guidelines for its delivery by teachers.

The **National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)** is an agency of the Department of Education and Science. Its main role is to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education and to inform the policy of the Department in the field of guidance. The Centre provides resources and supports to second level guidance counsellors as well as offering on-going professional development programmes.

In-School Programmes

The **School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI)** was established by the Department of Education and Science to stimulate and strengthen a culture of collaborative development planning in second-level schools. Its overall aim is to promote school improvement and effectiveness. The SDPI provides a support team and a number of guideline materials to assist schools in their planning process. The SDPI has also collaborated with

the Equality Authority to support schools in introducing an equality dimension within all planning processes through the development of support material.

While all curricula have the capacity to form and develop young learners in terms of understanding, skills and attitudes it is not possible to outline the full range of subjects or curriculum provision in schools in relation to supporting the inclusion of young LGBT learners. However, it is important for the purposes of this guide to identify a number of specific curricular areas that have a more explicit capacity to deal with issues of sexual orientation and inclusion. It is also relevant that curriculum support personnel for many of these programmes are provided through the Department of Education and Science under the auspices of the Second Level Support Services and in some cases in collaboration with the Health Service Executive.

Under the Education Act (1998) there is now an obligation on schools to promote the social and personal development of students and to provide health education for them. **Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)**, is therefore now part of the curriculum in all second-level schools. It sets out to support the personal development, health and well-being of young people and to help them create and maintain supportive relationships. Among the aims of SPHE is a commitment to enabling the students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities; to promoting self-esteem and self-confidence; to enabling the students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making; to providing opportunities for reflection and discussion and to promoting physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

Within SPHE, there is a specific module relating to **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**. All schools are obliged to produce a RSE policy statement and to ensure that this module is delivered within the overall SPHE programme.

The **Exploring Masculinities Programme** was developed for use in Transition Year and in the senior cycle of boys' single-sex schools. It was introduced nationally in 2000 as an optional module within the SPHE/RSE curriculum context. Among its aims are to offer boys the opportunity to explore different perceptions and experiences of masculinity and to promote understanding and respect for diversity. The area of sexual orientation is addressed explicitly within programme materials.

Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) is delivered in all second level schools. While there is no explicit reference within the curriculum to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, the course does aim to make pupils aware of the civic, social and political dimensions of their lives. It also seeks to encourage and develop the practical skills that enable students to engage in participative social interaction, and to adopt responsible roles as individuals, and as members of various communities within a democratic society. Further to this it encourages students to apply positive attitudes, imagination and empathy in learning about, and encountering, other people and cultures.

An understanding of sexual orientation is addressed in Social and Health Education Module II within the **Leaving Certificate Applied**. In the guidelines to teachers it is suggested that they challenge students to explore the question of why some people are labelled gay, sissy, and so on, and why is it that gay people are subject to prejudice. Emphasis, according to the module descriptor, should be placed on the fact that "*one's sexual identity is not fully attained until late teens or early twenties*" and that "*help and support is available to anyone experiencing doubts about their sexuality*"[74]. Both Contemporary Issues modules place an emphasis on the development of the broad area of citizenship and as part of the assessment of this course students undertake a contemporary issues task in which they investigate in greater detail an issue of concern to themselves.

[74] *It is important to note that such understanding is contrary to contemporary research in relation to sexual orientation.*

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