

Promoting Inclusion: A guide on Sexual Orientation

An inclusive
British Council





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Introduction

This guide aims to support knowledge, understanding and good practice in the area of sexual orientation. Its objectives are two-fold:

1) to nurture an inclusive organisational culture and a way of doing cultural relations, devoid of heterosexism¹, so that all the people who work with us and who we come into contact with feel comfortable being themselves irrespective of their sexual orientation;

2) to prevent prejudice and discrimination as a result of a person's sexual orientation.

To achieve this each of us needs to consistently display behaviours that support these objectives. In addition, we must ensure that our policies, processes and other mechanisms do not unjustifiably discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation.

The guide is organised into four parts. Part 1 provides a little of the background to the area covering some key ideas and issues. Part 2 briefly covers terminology. It is complemented by the glossary at Appendix 1. Part 3 sets out how the area of sexual orientation fits within our own approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Part 4 covers action, which is also incorporated throughout the guide, as well as questions and resources. We strongly encourage a review of the whole guide and application of what it suggests. If this is not possible, or a preference, do engage with it flexibly.

The guide does not claim to be comprehensive. Each of our diversity areas of focus is rich, broad and deep with contested perspectives and complexity, responding, for example, to new ways of thinking and external factors. No one guide, developed at a point in time, even if regularly updated, and intentionally kept reasonably short, can do justice to this reality. It is one reason why we encourage ongoing engagement with it and use of the resources listed, as well as continued related learning and development and behaviours that are consistent with its aims.

The guide has been written with the UK as reference point as the British Council is a UK headquartered organisation and policies are largely developed there and then applied globally. However, this diversity area is arguably especially subject to cultural and geo-political circumstances and widely varying attitudes and approaches that determine different responses to it across our global network. For example, a number of countries now allow for what might be perceived as full equality granting equal marriages, adoption, pension and fiscal rights. Others actively promote heterosexism and criminalise same-sex relationships to various degrees, with the death or other penalties still in place. Alongside this is the painful reality that many lesbian, gay and bisexual people can face intense rejection from their own families and

¹ Discrimination and prejudice against people who are not heterosexual, based on the presumption that opposite-sex relationships are normal and right and indeed superior.



communities; the key sources where most people would expect to be able to draw support and protection from. We touch on some of this in the guide but strongly advise further and ongoing research into both the local specifics and the wider global trends. Resources and where to start can be found at the end of the guide.

Very often sexual orientation is linked with transgender and intersex as referred to in the acronym LGBTQI+ (see Part 2 for more explanation). This guide does not cover transgender and intersex issues. At the British Council, we hold that transgender and intersex are about gender identity rather than sexual orientation and therefore they will be covered in the distinct gender guide that is being developed. We recognise that campaigns for equality often combine issues that impact on people of a minority gender identity and sexual orientation. However for the purposes of this guide, which has a focus on sexual orientation, we will use the shorthand LGB+.

Dissemination of the guide and what it encourages will be supported by ongoing workshops and webinars.

Like other EDI themed guides, this is a dynamic document that will be kept under review and informed by feedback which we welcome and encourage. Please do therefore send any comment to the Diversity Unit.



Part 1 Background

Sexuality is, like many things, socially constructed drawing on a range of influences. Although often considered a private matter, it is not. It pervades society in a range of ways, to varying degrees, dependent on place, era and other factors. At the same time, it is often difficult to talk about and read and write about because it can raise feelings of anxiety, confusion, disgust and curiosity and be perceived as an immoral or bad area. What is considered to be sexual is not fixed but ambiguous and complex with various meanings attached to it. For this reason, using the word sexuality to encompass sexual practices, desires, identities and orientation is useful.

Almost all humans experience sexual attraction. It is a valuable human characteristic and an important component of human survival. The object of attraction varies for each individual. This is increasingly being recognised, leading to more acknowledgement of same and mixed sex attraction.

As a result of socialisation and the combination of factors which are nurtured and are innate to us as humans, people have tended to view some feelings and behaviours as so called 'normal' human behaviour and some as falling outside this. This perception has been disrupted as more people acknowledge a range of sexual attractions. This has been liberating for a number of people and given them the confidence and sense of support to openly be themselves. This sadly does not hold for everyone, compounded by the fact that openness can lead to vulnerability and become life threatening.

Sexual orientation, which is so closely linked to sexuality, is about whom one is sexually attracted to and wants to have a romantic or sexual relationship with. The Diversity Unit has some discomfort with the term 'orientation' which is synonymous with 'leaning and inclination' and prefers the term identity which is synonymous with 'distinctiveness and uniqueness' and 'distinguishing from'. It is however prepared to use the prevailing terminology for reasons of consistency (for example with the UK equality legislation) and therefore overwhelmingly in this document and beyond uses the term sexual orientation.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people, with varying degrees of acknowledgement and visibility, have been part of the human family for as long as it has existed.

Research shows² that variations in sexual orientation have always been part of human nature. In recent decades more and more hidden stories, have been unveiled highlighting many indigenous cultures that recognised a diversity of human relationships and identities. Often,

² Leila J Rupp (2009): *Sapphistries: a global history of love between women*, New York University Press



through colonialization and rigid (largely western) religious teachings, this diversity was replaced by seemingly clear-cut moral codes and views. These held, amongst other things, that human relationships should be solely heterosexual with anything else, condemned, reinforced by persecution and sanctions. This includes the practice of so called ‘conversion therapy’ that seeks to ‘convert’ people, so they become attracted to people of the opposite gender. In addition, raids on social and other gatherings of LGB+ people have and still take place as a means of intimidation and harassment, alongside encouragement to report LGB+ people to the authorities in places where there is a hostile legal framework.

Matters relating to sexual attraction, whilst relevant to the workplace, are generally seen as private (and in some cultures, very private), non-work-related and therefore not openly discussed. This can make sexual orientation especially difficult to talk about, understand, engage with and address as already indicated, and make heterosexism difficult to challenge. But as cultural relations is all about people, relationships, acceptance, understanding and support for aspirations and realising potential, it is not an area to be ignored.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are, like any group, very diverse and at the same time essentially like heterosexual people, having the same basic human needs and aspirations. They are part of a range of families and communities, workforces and professions, not some ‘other’ group apart from the human family. The tenets of inclusion recognise this, whilst simultaneously taking account of distinct identities and needs. They focus on what joins as well as what separates us.

The needs of and issues for bisexual people as a group have been given especially scant attention and as a group they have remained largely invisible. There is a widespread assumption that you are either attracted to the opposite or same gender but not both.

As respondents in the Stonewall guide *Bisexual People in the Workplace*³ reports:

“I think the lesbian and gay community has made tremendous strides of progress over the last several years. Of course there’s a long way to go, but I would say that the bisexual community is many years behind where the lesbian and gay community is.”

“Bisexuality is something that you can poke fun at, partly because people don’t think it’s as serious as homosexuality.”

³ https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/bisexual_people_workplace.pdf



“I think there is a lot of ignorance around being bisexual and when you talk about it, people think you’re talking about your sexual practice rather than your orientation.”

In order to counteract the scant attention to the needs and issues for bisexual people we encourage the actions recommended by Stonewall and set out in Part 4.

The dominant discourses about sexuality involve the exertion and reinforcement of power with marginalised sexualities consequently disempowered and subjected to inequality, injustice and persistent exclusion of a systemic nature. Achieving inclusion needs an acknowledgement of this and the reality of heterosexual hegemony (dominance) and the power dynamics at play. This will help counteract what flows from and reinforces hegemony⁴.

⁴ <https://www.pagepress.org/journals/index.php/wpvh/article/download/6948/6560>



Part 2 – Language and terminology

The language and terminology we use plays an important part in influencing our outlook on the world and how we see, understand and judge it and each other. Language is an extremely strong determinant of perception. It is not static and changes over time, influencing the direction and content of discourse, and so requires our attention. For example, the term “queer”, which used to be wholly negative and offensive as a description of gay and lesbian people has been reclaimed by some LGB+ communities to describe themselves in an empowering way; as different from the majority and accepting of this difference.

Others reject it and use of the term by heterosexual people can be especially frowned upon. The Diversity Unit exercises caution with use of the term and encourages this stance.

Action *Pause for thought*

If you do not have membership of the LGB+, or other, communities that have reclaimed words previously deemed offensive, how appropriate and acceptable would use of words like queer be? Does your view change depending on the context or do you have a fixed view?

As already indicated above, sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to another person. It is distinguished from other aspects of sexuality including biological sex, gender identity and social gender roles. It exists on a continuum. It is different from sexual behaviour because it refers to feelings and is based on self-definition.

Sexual orientations include bisexual (attracted to people of more than one gender), heterosexual (attracted to a different gender), lesbian (women attracted to women who prefer to call themselves lesbian and not gay), gay (men and in instances women attracted to people of the same gender as themselves), asexual (don't experience sexual attraction for anyone) and a range of other terms which include homosexual, pansexual, queer and questioning (all defined in the glossary at Appendix 1), as well as a conscious refusal to adopt a label based on a rejection of labels, or the absence of an appropriate one. So, we are dealing with multiple terms and terminology related to sexual orientation. The ‘+’ after LGB acknowledges this.

The word ‘straight’ is widely accepted and used, including by authority bodies. However, the British Council's Diversity Unit rejects its use to denote or mean heterosexual. It views this as offensive, given that straight is often understood to be ‘correct’ and ‘right’ etc. and LGB+ people were (and still can be) labelled ‘bent’ to denote the “abnormal” and “unnatural”. The Unit's stance is not to dictate in these matters, but it does not endorse use of the term.



Action

Identify what terminology you personally subscribe to and why. To what extent is this influenced or determined by your networks, country of origin, work location, sector or business area? Has there been change over time? If so what is the change and what has shaped it?

Some of the terminology used in an English-speaking context might not easily transfer to other contexts.

Action

Check local language and context for the most appropriate terminology identifying where this is judgement free and positive. Understand the background before you use/adopt any related terms. Share and discuss your findings with colleagues. Consider committing as a whole team to positive language in all communications. Check in with the Diversity Unit before finalising to help a joined-up approach and shared learning.

Find ways to keep informed as things inevitably change.

Frequently a series of letters act as a shorthand for different sexual orientations. For ease of access, some of these are set out in Appendix 1 along with additional terms, useful concepts and symbols. For LGB+ individuals and communities their use can contribute to a sense of empowerment, mutual recognition and, shared identity, particularly in hostile environments.

There is no consistency in shorthand use within the British Council. As indicated above, the Diversity Unit uses LGB+. It is conscious of shortcomings regarding the relative attention given to bisexual people and in instances lesbians, which it seeks to address whenever possible. It believes use of shorthand should be informed by a considered approach.

Action

Review the symbols in Appendix 1 and become familiar with them. Note any that you did not know.

Consider the role and use of symbols and whether their use can support our cultural relations work to be more inclusive of LGB+ people.



Note that the word homosexual is often avoided especially because of negative past usage in the UK, USA and beyond. This is consistent with the position of the Diversity Unit, reflected in this guide which constrains its use but does not entirely avoid it.



PART 3 - Our approach

At the British Council we focus on six main areas of diversity whilst recognising and acknowledging many other areas, visible and hidden, as well as the nine protected characteristics in the 2010 Equality Act of Great Britain and protected characteristics within the legal frameworks of our varied operating environments.

As already indicated, unlike most organisations we do not include transgender and intersex within our definition of sexual orientation; they sit within our definition of gender and we use the letters LGB+ and omit the T and I, consistent with our stance. Many other organisations and entities, indeed the majority, use LGBT, or more letters to include different groups of people.

We believe all areas or characteristics of diversity are important and that they intersect with one another in ways that require acknowledgement and attention. For example, sexual orientation impacts differently on older and younger people and on males and females. Our focus on six distinct areas, in sometimes quite separate ways, is primarily to do with limited resources but also to simplify things to support engagement and understanding.

Consistent with the above, we do not support a hierarchy of areas or characteristics, or these being pitted against each other. Here we are especially acknowledging the often spoken about tension between sexual orientation and religion and belief, another area of focus for us.

A frequent related question within the British Council is:

Why is the British Council forcing me to accept LGB+ people when this is incompatible with my religious or cultural beliefs?

Action

Consider how you would answer the question above.

See the Frequently Asked Questions in Part 4 for the answer provided by the Diversity Unit.

The business, moral and legal case

Our wider and general EDI approach is supported by business, legal and moral reasons and their particular relevance to cultural relations. We draw on these for our focus on sexual orientation set out below.



The business case

The general business case for EDI holds for the area of sexual orientation. It includes but is not limited to the importance of EDI for our organisation and cultural relations work in different countries, with different partners and a richly diverse staff and stakeholder group, as well as seeking to attract and retain people and enhance our brand and reputation through relationship building, influence and impact. Without conveying respect for people and the diversity of their backgrounds and other aspects how credible and successful could we be?

The business case includes the costs for organisations and businesses when employees hide their sexual orientation, unable to be who they truly are and bring the whole and totality of themselves to work for fear of attracting negative judgement and being bullied, harassed and discriminated against. This can adversely impact on, for example, the quality of their engagement. In addition, there is the cost of hiring and retaining staff. The 2018 Stonewall research *LGBT in Britain – Work Report*⁵ showed that one-fifth of LGB+ workers report looking for a job specifically because the environment wasn't accepting of LGB+ people, and almost one in ten (9 per cent) successfully left a job for the same reasons; they were not comfortable. At the same time the retention benefits of inclusive work place environments are clear – for example one study showed that 26 per cent of respondents stayed in a job because the environment was accepting⁶.

Marketing directed towards specific groups, in this case towards LGB+ people, in order to widen the audience/customer base and explore and secure new opportunities is cited as an important business case element. In this context the advantage of tapping into the disposable income of LGB+ people sometimes includes reference to “the pink pound” to denote this income.

The 2018 report by the Peter Tatchell Foundation *The Economic Cost of Homophobia*⁷, strongly supports the business case. It includes the adverse economic impact of criminalising homosexuality on tourism and the loss of potential LGB+ tourists within a growing travel and tourism industry, where LGB+ tourists and their heterosexual companions tend to avoid travelling and expenditure in countries that are criminalising and persecuting of them. It also refers to aid, with criminalising countries increasingly challenged by donor standards and economic pressures. Denmark and Norway, for example, suspended direct aid to one such

⁵ https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_britain_work_report.pdf

⁶ <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-cost-of-the-closet-and-the-rewards-of-inclusion>

⁷ <http://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/report-a4-lo-res-1.pdf>



country and others took related action. This highlights a “growing understanding among aid donors that LGB+ rights are human rights and transgressors of these rights should pay the price in terms of cuts to aid.” Foreign investment is given attention in the report with reference made to the political and social environment of countries which are invested in. This attention has led to a reluctance of international businesses “to invest in countries where the human rights of a significant minority of the population are being violated.”

Moral case

The moral case is especially aligned to our organisational values which should underpin everything we say, do and stand for. It is a fundamental part of our commitment to inclusion and human rights which we touch on below.

To treat others with dignity and respect, to empathise, to create and nurture spaces that are not infected by preconceptions and stereotypes is quite simply the right thing to do. To reject hate and violence, fear or ignorance, or homophobia, biphobia or heterosexism (see the glossary), is right. It is also right to acknowledge that people’s feelings, experiences and perceptions differ and not dismiss these.

It is often hard to fathom why we are romantically and sexually drawn to someone and would consider them as a partner in or outside marriage, or for the long or shorter term. It is not a simple question of free will in this area. It is far more complex than that. Blaming people for their sexual preferences and imagining they can be ‘converted’ or changed is spurious and damaging and inconsistent with the moral case.

Homophobia and biphobia and related discrimination are harmful and dehumanising. At their root is an irrational fear or anxiety. Central to our internal and external work in this area with staff and partners is challenging homophobia, biphobia and other fears and prejudices whenever possible, and engaging appropriately in mutually respectful and beneficial dialogue. Through our EDI efforts which enjoy the support of many colleagues around the world and key British Council EDI groups, we aim to foster a more inclusive organisational culture and provide safe spaces for staff and contacts regardless of their sexual orientation.

Our Code of Conduct encourages respect and sets out behaviours we need to abide by as employees of the British Council. These are consistent with doing the right thing. Our organisational values of which there are five – valuing people, integrity, mutuality, professionalism and creativity - has the same aim. Together they inform and help determine our moral compass, including in EDI and with specific reference to sexual orientation.



The legal case

Much of what follows is UK-oriented for reasons already set out and practicality. We reiterate our encouragement to research the local situation.

Wherever we work there is legislation in place supporting the inclusion of various disadvantaged groups, sometimes including those disadvantaged on grounds of sexual orientation. However, in approximately 80 countries, same sex relationships are deemed unlawful and can incur severe punishments, including death. This variation raises organisational issues and challenges but does not detract from a constructive approach and our commitment to the inclusion of all those we work with irrespective of their sexual orientation.

Human rights, as an overarching set of rights, are globally recognised if not globally ascribed to. Sexual orientation however is a relatively recent idea in the context of human rights and there are no specific articles or provisions of protection. Indeed, there are a number of rights which are frequently violated, or infringed, or difficult to access for LGB+ people. These include but are not limited to the right to life, the right to freedom of movement, free expression and association, freedom from torture, or cruel or inhumane or degrading treatment and the right to a family.


Notwithstanding this, today same-sex marriage is legal in England, Scotland and Wales (Marriage Act 2013, England and Wales and the Marriage and Civil Partnership Act Scotland 2014) and a number of other countries (26 in total at the time of writing according to Pew⁸). It isn't however in Northern Ireland where additionally such marriages conducted elsewhere are also unrecognised.

Great Britain's Equality Act 2010 protects lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual people from direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation at work. It applies to anyone who is perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, or anyone who experiences discrimination because they associate with lesbian, gay or bisexual people and to heterosexual people who are subject to adverse treatment because of their sexual orientation. Some other countries' legal systems do so too, although Stonewall state that in over half the world, LGB+ people are not protected from discrimination in the workplace⁹.

Action

Consider how and why a person who is heterosexual might experience adverse treatment.

Research the situation in your country; are LGB+ people's rights protected in the workplace?



It is useful to bear in mind that regardless of the legal situation in a particular country there are almost always support systems, advisory bodies and NGOs in place¹⁰. This is an encouraging development.

Action

1. For an up to date overview of the global legal situation, visit ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association). This may determine the framework of working with sexual orientation in local offices
<https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws>
2. Find out about your local legal situation, LGB+ advisory bodies, NGOs, action groups. This might be helpful for employees, but they might also be valuable partners.
3. Undertake, suggest and encourage equality screening and impact assessment of new or revised local HR policies on parental leave, sick leave for children, health insurance etc. with the aim, wherever possible, of trying to make them as inclusive as possible, regardless of sexual orientation e.g. allow for adoption leave, specifically mention same sex partnerships. Given a long history and current practices of exclusion and discrimination do not assume people know they are included. Specific mention openly promotes inclusion and contributes towards the recognition, visibility and acceptance of same sex relationships.

There are different types of unjustified discrimination which hold across many legal systems and jurisdictions. The main ones are set out below. This is to help attune, alert and guard against them.

Action

Become familiar with the different forms of unjustified discrimination in a general way and then apply them to sexual orientation

¹⁰ The largest organisation in the UK is stonewall (www.stonewall.org.uk). They offer help and advice and a wealth of information material.



Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination in the context of this guide refers to someone being treated less favourably than someone else because of their sexual orientation, their perceived sexual orientation, or the sexual orientation of someone they are close to. This may include a friend, relative or colleague. It covers all sexual orientations.

Example

Someone's photo is removed from other photos of colleagues because they 'look gay' and this would upset the parents of children attending the teaching centre.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination refers to situations where a workplace provision, criterion or practice that applies to everyone puts people of a particular sexual orientation at a particular disadvantage.

Example

The office party includes an invitation welcoming married partners of British Council staff. There is no reference to those in a civil partnership. This has really upset two colleagues in a civil partnership. When they raised this, they were told 'we didn't consider you like a married couple and forgot about civil partnerships to be honest but come with your partners if you like'.

Harassment

Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct which violates someone's dignity or creates an intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Example

Jacob works in a friendly, lively office and jokes are often made about various people and aspects of themselves. This includes him as an openly bisexual person, comfortable being so. This feeling of being comfortable changes when there are references to him not being able to 'make up his mind' which he finds deeply upsetting. The general view is that Jacob shouldn't take these comments seriously as they are jokes and part of the work culture where everyone is teased about something and this makes things pleasant and relaxed.



Victimisation

Victimisation refers to treating someone less favourably because they have complained about direct or indirect discrimination or harassment at work, or they have supported someone else to do this.

Example

Xenia complained about being referred to as “Hettie” by two lesbian colleagues. They were dismissive of her concerns. The manager took action through an informal approach. The comments stopped. Xenia then became aware that the colleagues were uncharacteristically aloof with her but was especially upset to find that both made negative comments in their contribution to her performance appraisal that were a surprise and not supported by the quality of evidence generally provided.



PART 4 Actions, implementation and resources

The British Council is committed to good practice in all its EDI work but recognises that achieving this is a journey - a marathon, not a sprint.

In 2005, when Stonewall (the UK's largest LGB+ rights group) launched its first workplace award scheme, the Diversity Unit entered the British Council and won, coming first.


<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/british-council-is-uks-most-gay-friendly-employer/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jan/09/gayrights.business>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4161255.stm>

Since then our organisation has won awards and achieved recognition for its work to promote equality and inclusion in the area of sexual orientation in several countries including:

- Hong Kong where British Council were awarded 'GOLD' status by *Community Business* in their inaugural LGBT Workplace Inclusion Index. We ranked 10th.
- Ukraine where British Council came second place in the [2016 Corporate Equality Index](#), a national survey of corporate policies, rules and practices of private companies to prohibit discrimination in the workplace and support equality and diversity. The index includes the study of non-discrimination on grounds of gender, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- British Council Albania was announced as the Gold winner in the LGBTIQ Employment Equality Index for the third year, on October 5, 2018.

We have also been integral to the establishment of the initiative fivefilms4freedom achieving recognition for this: <http://film.britishcouncil.org/calendar/2018/fivefilms4freedom-update> In addition to these achievements our UK equality data shows good representation of LGB people in our UK workforce, especially at the most senior levels. The fact that we know representation, promotion and retention is generally very good for LGB colleagues, especially gay men, does not mean all is well or we should be complacent. However, we should certainly acknowledge progress and maintain our good practices, as well as strive to improve. Equality gains can unravel very quickly and micro and macro inequities remain a threat given that they are ever present for all marginalised groups and change in nature and emphasis.¹¹

¹¹ Individuals are either singled out, overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted based on a characteristic such as their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation.



Indeed, data collected from 2004 until 2015 via the online Implicit Association Test (IAT) suggests that 64 per cent of test takers have a slight to strong preference for heterosexual people, 18 per cent have no preference whatsoever and 18 per cent have a slight to strong preference towards gay and lesbian people¹². This means that in the workplace there will very likely be hidden bias, conscious, or not, against LGB+ people. Self-monitoring, increasing self-awareness and developing critical self-reflection will be helpful mitigating steps in response to bias. This is in addition to the appropriate application of our policies and values and code of conduct.

Action


Take the sexual orientation Implicit Association Test <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/> and find a colleague to share your results with. Incorporate this into learning about unconscious bias in general.

Actions to support the inclusion of bisexual staff

As already highlighted, the needs and issues for bisexual colleagues are often given scant attention. Here we set out some actions to help address this adapted from the Stonewall Guide. In instances there may be the opportunity to establish and respond to the needs and issues for participants and other stakeholders as well and this may be appropriate. Where this holds we encourage this.

- Promote awareness of bisexuality though incorporating a related theme in any diversity events, including diversity weeks or months and other forums, on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure bullying and harassment policies and supporting guidance refers to anti-bisexual comments and behaviour.
- Promote confidentiality – provide assurance that data and information will be treated in confidence and make sure this is really the case - consistently.
- Encourage, understand, highlight - encourage bisexual people to come out if they wish to; understand the issues bisexual people face particularly in our workplaces but also

¹² <http://www.projectimplicit.net/index.html>



during the course of undertaking cultural relations work; highlight their needs and perspectives and potential contribution e.g. to achieving a more inclusive workplace.

- Monitor progress and career development and act on findings – this can be achieved by breaking down equality monitoring data to establish progression and take up of development opportunities and identifying actions to take and progressing them.
- Consult bisexual staff on workplace issues – through focus groups and other mechanisms, especially as bisexual staff often report low satisfaction rates when they are consulted.

Employee engagement

Inclusive leadership should be an aspiration for everyone who has leadership responsibility. This is not specific to dealing with staff of diverse sexual orientations but is relevant in as much as it is about the ability to intentionally bring out the full potential of teams by empowering and valuing the unique contributions of individuals to support their engagement.

There are several general and specific things which can be done to support employee engagement, mitigate discrimination and promote inclusion, including for LGB+ people, in relation to:

Recruitment

- Promote the British Council as LGB+ inclusive.
- Advertise on community websites as appropriate.
- Take part in specialised job fairs and community events, like IDAHOT (International Day against homo/trans/biphobia) or Pride marches as appropriate.
- Equality monitor recruitment exercises.

Employment – initial first steps

- Include reference to sexual orientation as part of EDI in induction sessions.
- Make sure everyone understands that it is safe to ‘come out’ should they wish to but that they should feel no pressure to do so.
- Inform everyone about LGB+ networks they can access should they wish to.
- Clarify routes for reporting LGB+ related bullying and harassment.
- Challenge inappropriate behaviour through established channels.



Retention

- Make sure career paths are transparent and promotion opportunities are flagged up for all and do not present a barrier for LGB+ staff. Give particular attention to overseas posts in 'hostile' environments.
- Take complaints and grievances relating to sexual orientation seriously.
- Operate a clear line on harassment and discrimination. This is not the same as a zero-tolerance approach which is not an approach the Diversity Unit supports or advocates.
- Foster and engage in dialogue to emphasise the importance of inclusion of all staff. As part of this don't avoid difficult conversations or talking with people who have a range of views.
- Hold people accountable for any inappropriate behaviour and reward/praise positive behaviour.
- Equality monitor the promotion and retention of staff.

Exit


- Give opportunity to raise any issues concerning EDI or LGB+ discrimination as this may be easier with the employment coming to an end.
- Equality monitor exits.

Privilege

Privilege: an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious.
Peggy McIntosh

It is sometimes unclear why sexual orientation is an important diversity dimension in the workplace. This is because amongst other things, relationships can be viewed as a private matter, which there is some truth to. This however is invariably related to the fact that most people belong to the majority heterosexual group and don't often have to think about their sexual orientation because as the dominant one, it has privilege attached to it. LGB+ people on the other hand, must often expend energy deciding how they position themselves in relation to several factors.

This includes whom they are spending their leisure time and going on holiday with. Some feel such intense vulnerability and threat that they try to reduce it by inventing a relationship with a different-sex partner. This is psychologically damaging and energy depleting. Others feel comfortable 'coming out', something we aspire to supporting through our commitment to an inclusive organisational culture which is a central part of our EDI Strategy.



Below is a list to reflect upon that highlights some of the privileges that are connected to being part of a majority of heterosexual people.

Action

Draw on all or some of the following statements and reflect individually and/or discuss with others. You can answer 'yes' or 'no' from the standpoint of someone who is LGB+ and someone who is not, or on the basis of the prevailing culture in your part of the organisation, or in the country where you work. Do draw on any objective evidence you can but also any direct or indirect experiences colleagues have. Add to the list with reference to your distinct operating environment.

1. There is public recognition and support for all intimate relationships irrespective of the sexual orientation of parties (e.g. congratulations for an engagement).
2. You are socially accepted by colleagues, neighbours and good friends.
3. You have organisational role models who share your sexual orientation.
4. You expect to be around others with your sexual orientation most of the time. There is no worry about being the only one of your sexual orientation in a class, team, or work-related reception or after work event
5. You talk openly about your romantic relationship, holiday companion/s, family and related plans and issues with colleagues.
6. You will receive paid leave from employment when grieving the death of your partner/spouse.
7. You share your partner's health, car and homeowner's insurance policies at reduced rates.
8. You can accept job offers anywhere in the world and know that you will not be harassed, beaten, or killed because of your sexual orientation
9. You know that you will not be fired from a job, denied a promotion or reported to the 'authorities' based on your sexual orientation

Adapted by Sam Killermann at www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com from "White Privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh



Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I work for the British Council if my religion/culture sees homosexuality/bisexuality as a sin and forbids me to interact with LGB+ people?

We respect religious and cultural diversity across all our operations. We are not familiar with and have not encountered any religious or cultural edict that forbids *interaction* with LGB+ people. We have an Equality Policy that commits us to ensuring that there is no unjustified discrimination in the recruitment, retention, training and development of staff and beyond, based on their sexual orientation, amongst other diversity dimensions. In the context of our outward facing work we interact with LGB+ people too.

You may of course practice your religious and cultural beliefs in the workplace if they do not affect your behaviour towards staff, colleagues, customers and service providers. You cannot work for the British Council without interacting with LGB+ colleagues and others however. So, if this is an aspect of your religion or culture you feel you must uphold you would not be able to work for the British Council.

2. How do we engage with this diversity area when it is in fact unlawful in my country?

It is worth bearing in mind that there is some, what might be termed, ambiguity in relation to the lawfulness or otherwise of same sex relationships in different countries. This impacts on things 'on the ground'. It can allow for more possibilities than we might imagine. However, this should not be read as encouraging unlawfulness or blatant disrespect and disregard for cultures and their legal systems. This would be wrong and inconsistent with our values and the essence of cultural relations.

Legal classifications are often ambiguous and poorly defined. In many parts of the world, for example, male/male relationships are considered illegal, whereas female/female ones are simply not recognised, accounted for or commented on; the same holds for bisexual relationships.

Considerable variations exist in the extent to which countries actually enforce their laws, not to mention that things can change quickly (the UK alone has seen the age of same sex consent move from 21, to 18, and then 16, as well as the introduction of Equal Marriage – all within the last twenty years).

Same sex relationships are still deemed illegal in many of the countries in which the British Council operates. We therefore encourage staff to find out as much information as possible about their operating environment and the implications for promoting LGB+ inclusion or working there and how the laws and customs of that individual country might impact on their personal circumstances before any action, including job application. Many choose to check these things



before deciding on holding or participating in an event, or even deciding which jobs they want to apply for. This can be done via the internet, or various other sources of information, including relevant local NGOs, contacts and colleagues. See below for ways to keep up-to-date.

3. Where can I find information on the position of individual countries regarding LGB+ issues?

The situation in individual countries can be very complex and in a state of flux. Our own Visitors Notes, at their best, as well as guidebooks and other pieces of travel literature often have sections addressing sexual minority issues. Always be aware that circumstances change, and some editions may contain inaccurate information.

The International Lesbian and Gay Association website (ILGA) contains useful country-specific information including in the form of events, organisations and news articles.

Amnesty International and Stonewall (the UK-based gay rights organisation) can be helpful. Many countries or regions have similar associations, most of which can be found online.

The [British Council Families Association](https://www.britishcouncil.org/families-association) has some experience around this area.. The BCFA Manager (bcfa@britishcouncil.org) may be able to answer your questions directly or be able to put you in touch with members of the association who have had similar questions in the past.

4. Will my sexual identity in anyway restrict the countries in which I can work for the British Council?

As an employer committed to EDI, the British Council tries to ensure that there is no unjustified discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, or on any other irrelevant ground. Your sexual identity is not a factor taken into consideration when processing any stage of your job application, and the British Council will treat you in the same way and provide you with the same level of support as it would any employee.

However, it stands to reason that an individual applying to work in a country where homosexuality is either illegal or deemed socially and culturally unacceptable, may well encounter a greater number of difficulties surrounding all manner of issues relating to their personal circumstances and outside this, which are beyond the control of the British Council. The problems are likely to be greater if you wish to move to that country with your partner.

Although the British Council will offer as much support as possible, there may well be situations in which the ability to assist is limited. So, find out as much information as you can about the social and legal status of LGB+ people in any country in which you are considering working (see FAQ 3).



5. What different types of support are available to LGB+ staff?

The British Council is committed to providing its entire staff with a comprehensive range of support structures. There are some formal networks which UK staff are free to join, offering a forum for discussion and acting as a shared source of mutual advice and information (see FAQ 6), there are British Council departments dedicated to the assistance of all employees and their families (regardless of sexual orientation) (see FAQ 7 & FAQ 8), and also an informal network of experienced and dedicated colleagues contactable through the Diversity Unit to help with anything not covered by the information on these pages.

6. What formal networks are available to British Council LGB+ staff?

We would highlight two established groups. The first is FLAGG. The British Council has an agreement with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that enables all British Council staff to join FLAGG - the FCO network/affinity group for LGB+ employees. For more information about their activities or to apply to join, the organisation send an email directly to flagg@fco.gov.uk

The second is Proud, the LGB+ network of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS). It is open to all PCS members who are UK-contracted and is free to join, it provides advice and support, as well as a wide range of resources, including an online forum, and a quarterly magazine. For more information, visit their website, or contact the Trade Union Side (TUS) within the British Council.

A further establishing group (at the time of publication) in the form of an employee network is British Council Rainbow Connection.

7. How does the British Council Family Association support same-sex couples and families?

The BCFA provides support to the partners, civil partners, spouses and families of British Council staff who have been posted from one country to another. The partner, civil partner or spouse of any member of staff posted overseas is eligible to become a member of the BCFA and should contact the BCFA Manager (bcfa@britishcouncil.org) to request a membership application form. The BCFA Manager is not an expert in any specific field but has experience responding to queries from members regarding issues including naturalisation, same-sex partner visas etc. and past quarterly newsletter "BCFA news" have featured related articles.

Further information about the support available from the BCFA can be found on the intranet site.



8. How can the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) help or support LGB+ employees and their families/partners?

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provides free confidential advice, support and practical information to all British Council employees and their dependents in the UK and around the world. Working through Optum Health Solutions, an external company specialising in behavioural healthcare, they offer a wide range of services from simple telephone support through to stress and trauma counselling and specialist legal advice¹³.

The EAP has experience in dealing with many of the issues relevant to LGB+ people and all circumstances are treated with the sensitivity and total confidence that they often require.

The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with a telephone interpretation service also available. The service is particularly beneficial to British Council employees, partners, or other dependents living outside of the UK, and anyone finding themselves in need of help and support can contact Optum by telephone on 0800 282 193 from within the UK or from one of their other toll-free numbers, or by emailing askus@optum.co.uk.

9. How will any further de-diplomatisation affect the status of same-sex couples (when in and not in civil partnerships/marriages)?

The original de-diplomatisation policy was equality screened and impact assessed. The conclusion was that the policy would result in no unjustified discrimination based on sexual orientation, largely based on the fact that diplomatic status is awarded to a post and not an individual. However, it was absolutely recognised that there will be impacts as a consequence of de-diplomatisation for some groups. As a result of discussions at the impact assessment panel, the FCO was contacted and assurances sought that heads of missions will, when necessary, intervene with overseas governments to seek support for visas for same-sex partners of British Council staff posted overseas. Though this can never be guaranteed to work in every country, we take the spirit of assurances we have received as positive and supportive. The act of equality screening and impact assessment, and of sharing the results with the senior management team, has at least ensured that senior staff are very aware of the potential consequences of de-diplomatisation.

¹³ http://intranet.britishcouncil.org/hr/07Health_safety/Pages/EAP.aspx



10. Does the British Council assist in obtaining a visa for the same-sex partner of a British Council employee posted overseas?

The main issue here is that we do not unjustifiably discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation; it does not matter whether the individual in question is a same-sex partner or opposite-sex partner in terms of the support and supportiveness you can expect from the British Council.

That said, the question is still complex and does not have a straightforward answer. Currently there are many different departments within the organisation, all working in slightly different ways, usually for very specific reasons. There are also many different contract types and appointments, postings and jobs. Add social and cultural sensitivities, as well as legal restrictions, which vary considerably both from country to country and over time, it then becomes clear that it is simply not possible to provide a “one size fits all” answer.


Do contact the relevant Human Resources (HR) colleagues and seek their advice. Your enquiry will be dealt with sensitively and supportively.

11. If the partner of an employee is unable to obtain a visa for the country in question, what is the British Council's position regarding the original acceptance of the post?

We aim to be as supportive as possible and discuss the implications and options on a case by case basis. Some colleagues might be willing to consider taking the post on an unaccompanied basis, but we realise that this would not necessarily be workable, or possible for everyone. No one, of course, would be disciplined for withdrawing acceptance when there are such valid reasons, but at the same time – because of the nature of the recruitment process – there is no guarantee of the availability of an alternative post or job; indeed, it would probably be hard to find one due to the nature of our recruitment cycles. Needless to say, the disruption caused in these circumstances – to the individual and to the organisation – is significantly reduced by a proactive approach ahead of application and departure, rather than after. For this reason, we strongly encourage colleagues to research the issues to the best of their ability as soon as possible seeking relevant HR advice at every stage.

12. If an employee experiences unjustified discrimination and/or harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation while working for the British Council anywhere in the world, who could they approach?

All British Council employees are required to support the British Council's Equality Policy through their behaviours and attitudes and as part of this guard against unjustified discrimination of any kind within the workplace. This applies, within the British Council, including in countries where same sex relationships are illegal or viewed negatively. Unjustified discrimination, on the basis of sexual orientation, on British Council premises, or at the hands of



British Council employees in the course of employment is unacceptable. Anyone experiencing such discrimination should approach their line manager, HR representative, or other relevant staff member to help, where possible informally resolve this. If this is not possible they can also make a complaint through the established grievances procedures.

Where discrimination or harassment takes place outside the British Council, the situation is often complicated and can become dependent on the laws and practices of an individual country. Nevertheless, the British Council will be on hand to offer advice and provide what support it is able to.

13. What help will British Council provide if an employee or their partner is arrested on “moral” charges?

Regardless of the law in UK, all British Council employees abroad are bound by the laws of that country. If somebody commits what is considered a crime in that particular country, the British Council is not necessarily in a position to intervene.

Support and advice will, of course, be given, but the extent of assistance that can be provided would depend very much on the individual circumstances. The Employee Assistance Programme (see FAQ 8), available to all British Council employees and their families, offers a confidential 24-hour advice service, available free on 0800 282193 and can arrange for legal advice and counselling.

In a situation such as this, British citizens are entitled to full consular assistance. Citizens of other countries are advised to seek help from the relevant embassy.

14. Are there any individuals available to offer their advice and share their experiences as a LGB+ British Council employee abroad?

Yes. A number of British Council employees have expressed a willingness to act as informal contacts and pass on their experience and advice to any colleagues wishing to find out more about what to expect and how to deal with situations that might arise. Contact the Diversity Unit to arrange an email introduction. If you are interested in becoming an informal contact let the Diversity Unit know. Alternatively, existing support structures within the organisation may fulfil this function (see FAQs 5–8).

15. How does the British Council monitor LGB staff data?

The British Council meets relevant UK guidance regarding all areas of equality monitoring including sexual orientation. Therefore, data relating to the sexual orientation of UK-contracted staff is captured and principles of confidentiality adhered to. As part of extending equality monitoring outside the UK we have also collected data on the sexual orientation of staff



appointed locally in many of our regions and countries. Data collection for all equality areas is something we strongly encourage if there is agreement and understanding about why the data is being collected and how it will be used. It is because of data collection that we know there is no barrier to progression for staff to the most senior levels and in appointment to our Board of Trustees for LGB people.

Summary and conclusions

This guide has tried to cover some key points relating to the area of sexual orientation, in the context of our global presence, to raise awareness and support inclusion. In doing so it has touched on several issues, often not referred to or addressed in a single document. It has set out the business, moral and legal case, suggested action points and detailed some frequently asked questions.

The three appendices that follow act as information sources which will invariably complement what is already known and used and will be reviewed intermittently.



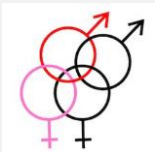

Whilst there is considerable attraction to information and knowledge acquisition, real progress comes from changed attitudes and behaviours and this is where we can all make our own distinct contribution. These can be through tangible actions, challenging constructively, inviting and responding to feedback from different sources and learning and unlearning new behaviours.

As already acknowledged, this guide is not exhaustive or comprehensive. It is intended to be an initial 'go to' resource and to help counter heterosexism and support our organisation to continue to do well where this holds and improve where we need to, in order to consistently deliver cultural relations that has equality, diversity and inclusion at its heart.

**Diversity Unit
November 2018**

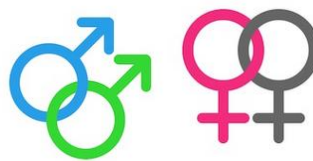
Full revision date November 2021

Appendix 1: Glossary

Term	Meaning	Symbols
Ally	A (typically) heterosexual person who supports members of the LGB community. This is a very important role in the struggle for equality and inclusion.	
Asexual	<p>Someone who does not experience sexual attraction to anyone regardless their gender.</p> <p>Some asexual people wear a black ring on the middle finger of their right hand.</p>	 
Bisexual (B)	An umbrella term used to describe an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction orientation towards more than one gender.	 
Biphobia	The fear or dislike of someone who identifies as bisexual based on prejudice or negative attitudes, beliefs or views about bisexual people. Biphobic bullying may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, bisexual.	
Coming out	When a person first tells someone/others about their identity as lesbian, gay and bi. Frequently used in the phrase “Coming out of the closet”.	

Gay (G)

A man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction orientation towards other men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality - some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.



Heterosexism

Discrimination and prejudice against people who are not heterosexual, based on the presumption that opposite-sex relationships are normal and right and indeed superior. It is deeply ingrained in widespread ideas and practices and policies.

Heterosexual

Refers to a person who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction orientation towards people of the opposite gender (within what we acknowledge is a binary system of gender).



Homophobia

A key aspect of heterosexism. Characterised by an irrational view of homosexuality as a threat which reflects and reinforces heterosexist ideology and the notion that human beings are naturally orientated to be sexually attracted to people of an opposite gender only.

Homosexual

Considered a medically oriented and somewhat outdated and uncomfortable term due to historical usage associated with it, used to describe someone who has an emotional romantic and/or sexual attraction orientation towards someone of the same gender. The terms “gay” and “lesbian” are now more generally used.



Lesbian (L)

Refers to a woman who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards women.



LGBTQIA+

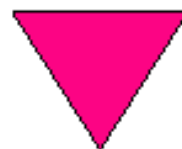
Acronym to describe gender and sexual identity diversity, which has changed and continues to change over time to include more people; used in different combinations (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-Gender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual + any other that identify differently to the aforementioned).

Outed

When a lesbian, gay or bisexual person's sexual identity is disclosed to someone else without their consent. It may be used to bully and harass people particularly in circumstances where an outing has severe negative impact on the person.

The colour Pink/ pink triangles

Prisoners in Nazi Germany (1933-1945) concentration camps were labelled according to their 'crimes' by inverted coloured triangles. The pink one was used for gay men. Later the LGB liberation movement re-claimed the colour and the symbol as a colour/symbol of empowerment and community building.



Pansexual

A person whose emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by biological sex, gender or gender identity.





**Pride/ Pride
March/
Christopher
Street Day/
Rainbow Pride**

Annual celebrations of the LGB+ communities around the world.

It is held in memory of the Stonewall Riots, the first big uprising of LGBT people against police assaults that took place at the Stonewall Inn, a bar on Manhattan, New York City's Christopher Street in the district of Greenwich Village on 28 June 1969.

In many cities/areas it is now a day to celebrate, empower and for communities to come together. In some places is being prohibited or participants are under violent threat from state forces and/or the public.

Queer (Q)

Originally a derogatory term for LGB+ individuals. The term has now been reclaimed by some LGB+ people in particular those who don't identify with traditional categories around gender identity and sexual orientation but is still viewed to be derogatory by some.

Questioning

The process of exploring your own sexual identity.

Rainbow flag

Developed by artist Gilbert Baker in 1978 in the USA and now one of the most widely used and recognized symbols of the LGB+ movements.



Appendix 2: Useful links and resources

Organisation	What are they doing?	What's on offer?
Amnesty International	World's leading human rights organisation, campaigning against injustice and inequality everywhere, including on grounds of sexual orientation discrimination.	Supporting work to end LGBTI discrimination.
Stonewall www.stonewall.org.uk	UK's largest LGB+ NGO, working with individuals, organisations, law makers, education sector to empower, transform and change on individual and structural levels.	Glossary, educational material for children and adults, working in partnership in the UK and increasingly globally.
Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com	An independent statutory body with the responsibility to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Britain, enforcing equality legislation for all protected characteristics, including LGB+.	Advice, legal help, reading lists and research in relation to all Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics, including sexual orientation.
Equality and Human Rights Sexual Orientation reading list. www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-research/reading-lists/sexual-orientation-reading-list	Provides extensive reading list on work place relevant literature.	
ILGA -The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association www.ilga.org (check for regional websites)	Through advocacy, empowerment and research ILGA work to promote the rights of the LGB+ global community.	Resources include global reports, sexual orientation laws, maps, global attitudes survey and much more.



<p>It's pronounced metrosexual!</p> <p>www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com</p>	<p>Providing learning about gender, sexuality, and social justice by sharing articles, edugraphics, and other online resources.</p>	<p>Material around exploring gender identity, sexual identity and much more.</p>
<p>GLAAD</p> <p>www.glaad.org</p>	<p>Promoting cultural change in the media, annual media awards.</p>	<p>Information, reports, research on LGB+ in the media (film, TV).</p>
<p>It gets better project</p> <p>www.itgetsbetter.org</p>	<p>Suicidal rates amongst LGB+ youth is still one of the highest. The project creates powerful, empowering, personal messages (videos) of LGB+ adults for young people growing up and asserting their sexual identity and/or gender identity.</p>	<p>Empowering videos aimed at young LGB+ people but equally relevant as part of training sessions, starting discussions, raising awareness of LGB+ life around the globe. Possible to record and upload own message.</p>
<p>Young adult fiction reading lists</p> <p>https://www.goodreads.com/list/tag/sexual-orientation</p>	<p>A collection of reading lists.</p>	
<p>Pride (movie)</p> <p>Matthew Warchus (director)</p>	<p>Inspired by an extraordinary true story. It's the summer of 1984, Margaret Thatcher is in power and the National Union of Mineworkers is on strike, prompting a London-based group of gay and lesbian activists to raise money to support the strikers' families. Initially rebuffed by the Union, the group identifies a tiny mining village in Wales and sets off to make their donation in person. As the strike drags on, the two groups discover that standing together makes for the strongest union of all.</p>	<p>Recommended for excellent depiction and discussion of intersectionality as part of training session or themed movie night.</p>



<p>IO Tillet Wright: Fifty shades of gay (TED talk in English with subtitles in many languages)</p> <p>http://www.ted.com/talks/io_tillett_wright_fifty_shades_of_gay</p>	<p>Good TED talk on the diversity of sexual identity.</p>	<p>Useful as part of a training session and discuss.</p>
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Appendix 3: International Days

Here is a list of international days which may be useful to mark internally or with external partners:

17 May	IDAHOT/ IDAHOBIT – International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia	dayagainsthomophobia.org The day was chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990 to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. It was created in 2004 to draw the attention of policymakers, opinion leaders, social movements, the public and the media to the violence and discrimination experienced by LGB+ people internationally.
10 December	International Day of Human Rights	
All year round, check for local dates	Pride March	https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/pride-event-calendar (Europe dates) See also glossary