



# LGBT IN BRITAIN

## UNIVERSITY REPORT

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# FOREWORD

**University is a time for all students to learn, grow and enjoy independence. But for many lesbian, gay, bi and trans students, the experience can be marred by discrimination, exclusion and abuse because of who they are.**

This report, part of our state of the nation LGBT in Britain series with YouGov, asked 522 LGBT students about their experience at Britain's universities. While there are many positive experiences of institutions getting it right, there are also some worrying accounts of students facing discrimination and a lack of inclusion because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Three in five trans students have experienced negative comments from other students because of their identity, with one in five LGB students who aren't trans saying the same. Concerningly, LGBT students who experience these incidents often don't feel confident reporting them to university staff, meaning they're left unchecked.

The report also contains worrying testimonies from trans students, who often aren't addressed by staff with their correct name and pronoun and don't feel able to use facilities because of concern about discrimination.

Many universities are now recognising the need to do all they can to support their LGBT students. They've taken steps to establish clear points of contact for students to report incidents of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse, consulted with LGBT students and worked hard to ensure that policies, university facilities, accommodation and public spaces are inclusive. Action to increase LGBT visibility, through representation of LGBT perspectives in course curricula and well-funded LGBT student societies, has helped LGBT students to see themselves as part of the community.

And these efforts are recognised by students, with more than two thirds stating that their university shows visible commitment to LGB equality and have equalities policies that protects LGB students on campus. Some students even told us that they feel safer to be out at university than at home. For trans students, though, the picture isn't always as positive. Fewer trans students say that their institution is supportive; one in ten say they don't feel comfortable to be themselves.

It's clear that progress has been made, and we should celebrate that. But this report shows that universities still have more to do, especially for trans students, so that all LGBT students can feel safe, included and free to be themselves. By working together with their LGBT students, universities have and can create a learning environment where every LGBT person, is accepted without exception.

Ruth Hunt, Chief Executive

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# THE STUDY

Stonewall commissioned YouGov to carry out a survey asking more than 5,000 lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) people across England, Scotland and Wales about their life in Britain today.

This report, part of a series based on the research, investigates the specific experiences of 522 LGBT university students who took part. The study reveals the extent to which LGBT students are still subject to discrimination at university. It also looks at steps universities take to ensure a safe and equal study environment for LGBT people, for example implementation of equality policies, steps to make the campus trans inclusive and visible commitment from staff.

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# KEY FINDINGS

- **More than a third** of trans students (36 per cent) and **seven per cent** of lesbian, gay and bi students who aren't trans faced negative comments or conduct from university staff in the last year because they are LGBT.
- **Three in five** trans students (60 per cent) and **more than one in five** lesbian, gay and bi students who aren't trans (22 per cent) have been the target of negative comments or conduct from other students.
- LGBT disabled students are particularly likely to have been the target of such remarks from other students; **almost half** of LGBT disabled students (47 per cent) have experienced this.
- **Seven per cent** of trans students were physically attacked by another student or a member of university staff in the last year because of being trans.
- **Two in five** trans students (39 per cent) and **more than one in five** lesbian, gay and bi students (22 per cent) wouldn't feel confident reporting any homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying to university staff.
- **More than two in five** LGBT students (42 per cent) hid or disguised that they are LGBT at university in the last year because they were afraid of discrimination.
- **One in five** trans students (20 per cent) were encouraged by university staff to hide or disguise that they are trans.
- **One in four** non-binary students (24 per cent) and **one in six** trans students (16 per cent) don't feel able to wear clothes representing their gender expression at university.
- **One in six** trans students (17 per cent) report being unable to use the toilet they feel comfortable with at university.



# DISCRIMINATION AT UNIVERSITY

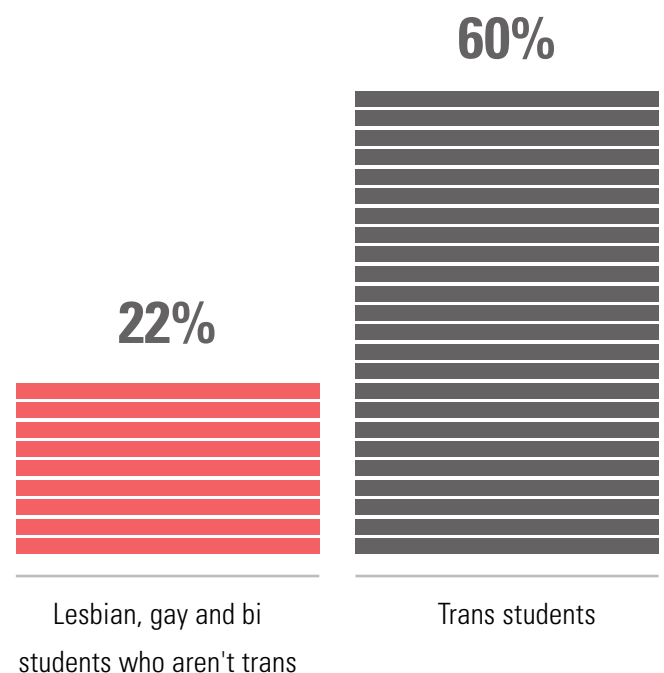
LGBT students still face discrimination, exclusion and barriers at university because of being LGBT. Many LGBT students report being excluded by other students and have been subjected to derogatory remarks and behaviour from other students and even staff. A number of trans students have experienced a physical attack by someone at university.

**One in seven** LGBT students (14 per cent) have been the target of negative comments or conduct from a member of university staff in the last year because they are LGBT. This rises to **more than a third** of trans students (36 per cent) compared to **seven per cent** of LGB students who don't identify as trans. **Almost one in four** black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT students (24 per cent) and LGBT disabled students (22 per cent) have experienced this in the last year.

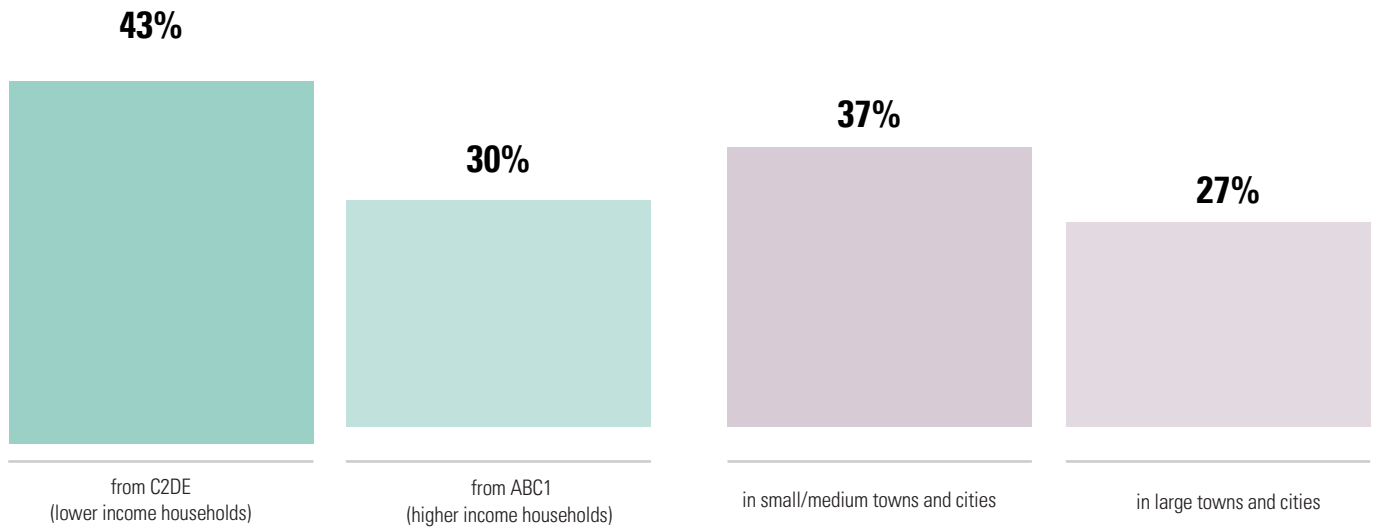
*I am studying to be a primary teacher. My previous tutor used homophobic language and actions during one of my school visits. I have made a complaint which is currently ongoing at the university. My tutor was changed which was a start. The university flies the rainbow flag during gay history month but there is a real issue with discriminatory attitudes and actions in the staff team.* Frank, 35 (Scotland)

**A third** of LGBT students (33 per cent) have been the target of negative comments or conduct from other students in the last year because they are LGBT. This number increases to **three in five** trans students (60 per cent) compared to **22 per cent** of LGB students who aren't trans.

LGBT university students who have been the target of negative comments from other students



## LGBT students who have been the target of negative comments from other students in small/medium towns and cities



**Almost half** of LGBT disabled students (47 per cent) experienced negative comments or conduct from other students. LGBT people in category C2DE (lower income households) are also more likely to experience this than LGBT people in ABC1 (higher income households), **43 per cent** compared to **30 per cent**. LGBT students from smaller towns and cities are more likely to experience this than LGBT students from larger towns and cities, **37 per cent** and **27 per cent** respectively.

**Almost half** of LGBT students (46 per cent) witnessed negative comments or conduct at university in the last year directed at another student or a member of staff perceived to be LGBT.

**Seven per cent** of trans students were physically attacked at university in the last year because of being trans.

*I was walking to the university library when a group of young people started yelling things at me like "oh look at this dyke", "you look like a man... wait, is that the point, you tranny?" as I walked past.*

Michael, 23 (Scotland)

*When going on a night out at the student union at university, I often receive very dirty looks about my appearance which is quite wacky and feminine. I have been called faggot or poof at this place on a night out. I believe it's because of lad culture from the sporting societies and groups associated with it.*

Constantine, 19 (Wales)

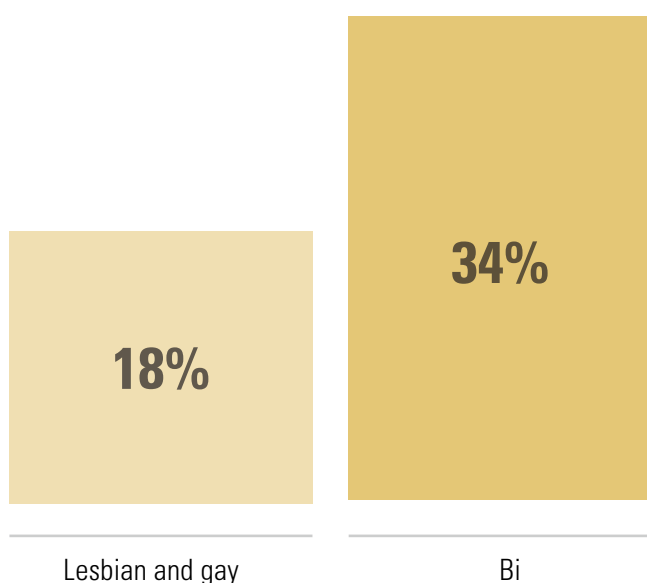
*I have recently started at a new university. I was laughed at, ridiculed, and became the butt of jokes that normally gender me as a woman. This has been constant since day one.*

Taylor, 23 (South East)

*I was playing volleyball with the men's team and was told I was not allowed to play matches unless I played with the girls' team. I made a formal complaint.*  
*Alex, 22 (London)*

**More than a quarter** of LGBT students (28 per cent) say they were excluded by other students in the last year for being LGBT. This number increases to **half** of trans students (52 per cent) compared to **19 per cent** of LGB students who don't identify as trans. Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT students and LGBT students of faith are also more likely to be excluded, both **37 per cent**, as well as LGBT disabled students, **36 per cent**.

University students who were excluded by other students for being lesbian, gay or bi



*I went to a Christian event at university and it was heavily implied that they thought being LGBT+ was sinful and wrong.*  
 Kevin, 20 (North West)

**Almost a quarter** of trans students (23 per cent) say they aren't addressed with their correct name and pronouns.

*My pronouns and preferred name are not used by my university tutor, and only by very few students.*  
 Jan, 19 (Wales)

*The university email system will not use my preferred name unless I change it by deed poll, an option currently unavailable to me for complex reasons, and so I am forced to see my dead name attached to every email and computer document I produce, even on my own software.*  
 Alex, 22 (London)

*In the university people have refused to refer to me with the proper pronouns because they "don't see me as a woman" despite me fully presenting myself as such. I have not worn a dress once for the last couple months due to the weather and as such I have been seen as "not trans enough". People assume you should be dolled up at any given moment but if you were to try this like some trans women I'm familiar with, you'd be seen as "trying too hard" and "faking it". I have been told that I'm undermining the image of women by a number of students and it has caused me to feel unable to socialise with my peers.*  
 Lisa, 21 (Wales)

**One in seven** trans students (14 per cent) had to drop out of a course or considered dropping out of a course because of experiencing harassment or discrimination.



# BEING OUT AT UNIVERSITY

University remains a challenging environment for many LGBT students to be themselves. A concerning number of LGBT students still don't feel safe to disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Some have even been encouraged by university staff to hide their identity at university.

**One in eight** lesbian, gay and bi students (13 per cent) aren't open with anyone at university about their sexual orientation. This number increases to more than **22 per cent** of bi students compared to **five per cent** of gay and lesbian students. **Fifteen per cent** of trans students aren't open about identifying as trans.

A welcoming university environment is important because many LGBT students cannot be open about being LGBT with their family. **One in five** lesbian, gay and bi students (20 per cent) aren't open to anyone in their family about their sexual orientation. **One in six** trans students (16 per cent) aren't open to anyone in their family about their gender identity.

*I feel safer to be out at university, though I still play it by ear on a person by person basis.* Laura, 25 (East Midlands)

*I felt able to come out to my parents without them feeling too awkward about it. Although I am yet to tell my educational institution.* Jana, 21 (Scotland)

**More than two in five** LGBT students (42 per cent) hid or disguised they are LGBT at university in the last year because they were afraid of discrimination. This rises to **three in five** trans students (61 per cent) compared to **a third** of LGB students (34 per cent) who don't identify as trans. This number is also higher for LGBT disabled students, **51 per cent**, as well as black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT students, **48 per cent**, and LGBT students of faith, **46 per cent**. Bi students are more likely to hide or disguise their

identity due to fear of discrimination, **47 per cent**, compared to **29 per cent** of gay and lesbian students.

**One in five** trans students (20 per cent) were encouraged to hide or disguise that they are trans by university staff in the last year. **Three per cent** of lesbian, gay and bi students, who don't identify as trans, have been encouraged to hide their sexual orientation. LGBT students in rural areas are more likely to have experienced this, **18 per cent**, compared to LGBT students living in urban areas, **seven per cent**. **Sixteen per cent** of black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT students and **13 per cent** of LGBT students of faith have been encouraged to disguise their identity.

**One in six** non-binary students (16 per cent) and **one in ten** trans students (10 per cent) don't feel able to be themselves at university, compared to **six per cent** of LGB students who aren't trans. This number is also increased for LGBT disabled students, **14 per cent**, and LGBT students of faith, **11 per cent**.

Many trans students face additional barriers at university which prevent them from being able to be themselves.

**One in four** non-binary students (24 per cent) and **one in six** trans students (16 per cent) don't feel able to wear clothes representing their gender expression at university, compared to **three per cent** of LGB people who don't identify as trans. **One in six** trans students (17 per cent) report being unable to use the toilet they feel comfortable with at university.

# BARRIERS TO AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

The best universities recognise the value in taking proactive steps to create an inclusive learning environment, but all too often, LGBT students still face barriers. This includes little confidence in bullying reporting procedures, a lack of visible commitment for LGBT equality and inadequate equality policies.

**More than two thirds** of LGBT students (69 per cent) say their university has equalities policies that protect lesbian, gay and bi people on campus. However, only **half** of LGBT students (50 per cent) say their university has equalities policies that protect trans students.

**Almost one in four** LGBT students (23 per cent) say that their university doesn't demonstrate visible commitment to trans equality. **One in ten** LGBT students (10 per cent) say that their university lacks visible commitment to LGB equality.

**More than one in five** lesbian, gay and bi students (22 per cent) wouldn't feel confident reporting any homophobic or biphobic bullying to their university staff. Women and non-binary students feel less confident in reporting this bullying, **28 per cent** and **25 per cent** respectively, compared to **13 per cent** of men.

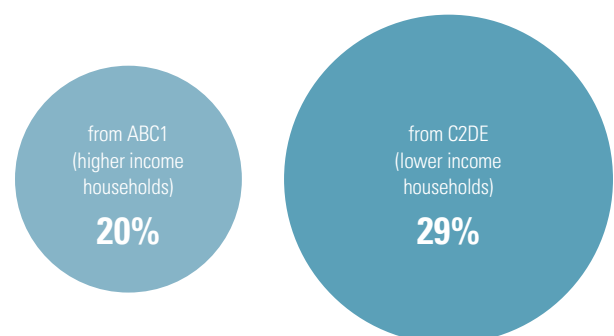
**Two in five** trans students (39 per cent) wouldn't feel confident reporting transphobic bullying at university.

Universities who establish an inclusive environment, by showcasing best practise equality policies, have a real impact on the lives and well-being of LGBT students.

*My university has made great leaps in welcoming all students. One facet that greatly pleased me was the introduction of gender neutral bathrooms.*

Melanie, 23 (Scotland)

Lesbian, gay and bi students who wouldn't feel confident reporting any homophobic or biphobic bullying to staff



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Universities should:

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### Develop clear policies and training

- Have clear and widely promoted policies, which communicate a zero-tolerance approach to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic discrimination, bullying and harassment.
- Establish a point of contact so that students understand where to report abuse and what to expect once a report has been made.
- Provide staff training on what anti-LGBT discrimination or abuse might look like, why it is bad for teaching and how to tackle anti-LGBT abuse safely.

### Work with societies to support LGBT students

- Engage in meaningful consultation with LGBT student societies to ensure that policies, accommodation and university facilities are LGBT inclusive.
- Provide resources and support to LGBT societies and student unions to increase the availability of peer-to-peer support.
- Ensure that, during inductions, new students are signposted to local LGBT-inclusive services and LGBT student societies.

### Improve trans inclusion

- Develop a policy to support trans students who are transitioning, including information on confidentiality and use of facilities. Guidance for staff with responsibility for pastoral care should also be provided

### Support LGBT visibility

- Where possible, make sure that LGBT perspectives are well represented within course content, to ensure that LGBT history and experiences are represented in teaching.
- Communicate a clear commitment to LGBT inclusion to current and prospective students and staff, through promotional materials.

### Get involved in Stonewall's programmes

- Join more than 100 British universities on Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme, the UK's leading best practice forum for employers on LGBT inclusion. Visit [www.stonewall.org.uk/diversity-championsprogramme](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversity-championsprogramme) to find out more.
- Submit to Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index, a completely free benchmarking tool that helps to assess an organisation's progress on LGBT equality and functions as a framework for improving the experiences of LGBT students and staff.

# METHODOLOGY

Between February and April 2017, 5,375 LGBT people across England, Scotland and Wales completed an online questionnaire about their life in Britain today, which was administered by YouGov on behalf of Stonewall.

Participants were recruited through the YouGov panel and via an open recruitment that was circulated through a wide range of organisations, community groups and individuals.

## The sample

- The overall sample size of participants who were university students at the time of the study is 522 students.
- 43 per cent of these university respondents are from England, 29 per cent are from Wales and 28 per cent are from Scotland.
- 51 per cent are female, 38 per cent are male and 11 per cent describe their gender in a different way. Different terms that respondents used to describe their gender identity include 'non-binary', 'genderfluid' and 'genderqueer'. People who used a different term to describe their gender identity are referred to as 'non-binary people' throughout the report.
- 45 per cent are gay or lesbian, 40 per cent are bi, 13 per cent use a different term to describe their sexual orientation and one per cent are straight. Different terms that respondents used to describe their sexual orientation include 'pansexual' and 'queer'.
- 17 per cent said they identify as trans and another five per cent said they are unsure of whether they are trans or are questioning their gender identity.
- 36 per cent are disabled.
- 11 per cent are black, Asian or minority ethnic.

The figures have been weighted by region and age. All differences reported in the survey are statistically significant. All names in quotes have been changed for anonymity and ages have been assigned from within age bands.

# LGBT IN BRITAIN

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## UNIVERSITY REPORT

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*Michael, 23 (Scotland)*

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*Taylor, 23 (South East)*

Designed by Dean McNamara

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