

Pride in Tennis – Written evidence (NPS0104)

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1. I am submitting this evidence on behalf of a group of voluntary key activators in LGBTQI+ UK tennis who are part of a movement across Sport to show greater visibility of inclusion, equality, and diversity towards the LGBTQI+ community. Our aim is to increase participation for a community within the UK who have been shown to be less likely to meet the minimum recommendations of weekly physical exercise and are disproportionately at risk of long-term mental health problems. Therefore, most of the information below relates to questions 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10.
2. How can adults of all ages and backgrounds particularly those from under-represented groups, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? Including examples of good practice.
3. Although the research is limited in this field of study there are some common themes when looking at participation levels and barriers to Sport for the LGBTQI+ community.
4. Pride Sports study 2016 commissioned by Sport England showed 55% of LGBTQI+ men are not active enough compared to 33% of the general population. With Women the gap was lower (56%/45%), but higher (64%) for those who ID as neither male nor female.
5. Common barriers were:
 - heteronormative and CIS normative environments,
 - banter/language/toxic masculinity
 - Internal perceived barriers about the sporting environment by participants making them unable to come out. Often created due to unconscious bias and stereotyping, historically originating from the sporting community, the media and the LGBTQI+ community themselves.
 - Experiences in school/PE changing rooms as LGBTQI+ youths.
 - A lack of role models at professional level, especially in men's professional sport.
6. To date there is little data specifically attributed to tennis on this issue, but the lack of Out professionals indicate it has a problem shared by most high-profile sports. My personal experience to date is there is less awareness and discussion around these barriers in comparison to other protected characteristics such as those with disabilities, women's sport, and race, from grassroots level through to National and International governing bodies.

7. I regard sport as saving my life after attempting suicide as a teen. The positive impact of physical exercise in the fresh air, and the social nature of tennis got me through my darkest depressions. Here is a reminder as to why LGBTQI+ visibility in Sport is so important. (stats obtained from mindout.org.uk and South Tyneside council 2018)
 - In 2018 50% of the LGBTQI+ community were diagnosed with a long-term mental health problem. Double that of the general population.
 - 3% of men who identify as gay attempted their own lives in the last year compared to 0.4% of the general population. For men who identify as bisexual it was 5%.
 - Men are more than twice as likely to self-harm, 50% have suffered domestic abuse compared to 17% of men who identify as heterosexual.
 - Women who identify as LGBTQI+ are also more likely to smoke, drink and self-harm.
 - 1/3 of people who identify as trans have attempted suicide multiple times.
8. And for those who think we live in more enlightened times and the younger generation 'doesn't have the problems that we had as kids.'
 - LGBTQI+ youths are 4 times more likely to suffer with depression.
 - 3 times more likely to have anxiety.
 - Males are 7 times more likely to attempt suicide.
 - 78% have experienced verbal abuse.
9. Having presented this and anecdotal evidence from key activators to the LTA executive, they have acknowledged for the first time there needs to be greater support in tennis for the LGBTQI+ community. They want to use their 'Open the court' IDE branding to be more visible in promoting LGBTQI+ participation. Previously they and many others in the game struggled to understand the subtle and complex barriers for LGBTQI+ participants. However, Andy Murray in an article for Pridelife.com highlighted the work by the FA, Rugby Union and even the WTA but noticed there had been nothing from the ATP or LTA. 'They should definitely be doing a better job to celebrate Pride. I will investigate it. More diverse people on boards and committees would absolutely support young players coming out'.
10. It is well documented that the LGBTQI+ population have high rates of mental health issues and suicide rates partly due to environmental and cultural factors and partly due to the nature of the process of discovering your sexuality or gender identity. It is also scientifically proven that physical exercise is good for your mental health.
11. Solutions- LGBTQI+ sports networks- a stepping-stone for the LGBTQI+ community into Sport. Example of good practice 1: National
12. We are launching a network in tennis this year in collaboration with the LTA to align ourselves with football, rugby, baseball, horse racing, motor racing, aquatics, athletics and cycling who have already launched networks. Some have been launched by volunteers and some in collaboration with governing bodies. The umbrella organisation 'Pride Sports network' helps all LGBTQI+ inclusive clubs and groups around the UK.

13. There are local, national, and international networks supporting LGBTQI+ athletes. There is also a dedicated media network to showcase activities to the community. The collective aims of these networks are to:
 - Hold the governing body to account to ensure there is visible support and representation in tennis. Ensure they open a channel of consistent communication and engagement, help networks to launch and promote their work, and make sure they take a full and active part in national campaigns such as Stonewall's Rainbow laces campaign and Pride month.
 - Be a safe space and a support for LGBTQI+ athletes, fans, coaches, and officials to be their authentic selves. To connect people from around the UK to either talk about or play sport with other LGBTQI+ players, making it easier for them to be able to exercise and maintain good mental health.
 - Support LGBTQI+ inclusive clubs who offer LGBTQI+ inclusive sports sessions. Northern Aces Manchester, Tennis London, the South London Smashers, and Bragg tennis Brighton are examples in tennis. They can share examples of good practice for recruitment, tournament hosting, venue support and help with grant funding. These clubs are shown to be a great stepping-stone to get LGBTQI+ players into mainstream Sport.
 - Providing education, personal experiences and an informed voice around the topic of LGBTQI+ inclusion for sports bodies locally and nationally.
 - Promoting positive role models, news stories and flagship events such as the Gay Games.
 - To obtain funding to create resources and training to mainstream sports venues and schools to help them become more LGBTQI+ friendly in Sport and Physical Education classes.
14. Example of good practice two: Regional
15. The South London Smashers are a great example of how one motivated volunteer got hundreds of new LGBTQI+ participants to play tennis. Using the 'Just meet' app, he was able to find people from the local LGBTQ+ community keen to exercise, found some courts and a coach and began sessions which have spread and grown to 500 players with over 200 regulars in the year before Corona virus hit. As with all these networks, they are open to people of all sexualities, (including heterosexuals) but with a bit of targeted marketing, support from sports venues, an awareness of the barriers for the target market, and pro-active and well-supported volunteers, it is possible to reach out to an under-represented group and bridge the barriers preventing them from participating. This successful model is already applied in many sports for those with disabilities, Women, the BAME community, and people from different religions and heritages who will have different barriers to overcome.
16. Example of good practice three: International
17. The GLTA is the international umbrella organisation for tennis associations which have a specific diversity agenda. Data suggests where there is consistent support from either the National tennis body or local government there is a significant increase in organisations at grassroots level as well as competitive events which improve the visibility and profile of the LGBTQ+ sporting community and commit participants to compete in sport in a safe space. These events have developed significant connections with local charities raising

hundreds of thousands of pounds to support individuals and communities in need. So, the interface between the LGBT community at large and disadvantaged individuals and cohorts contributes to the diversity agenda and social cohesion.

18. Annual events
 - USA, 25+ events, 4000+ participants
 - Italy, 4+ events, 500+ participants
 - Spain, 5+ events, 750+ participants
 - Australia 5+ events 750+ participants
 - UK 1 or 2 events 120 participants
19. In Summary, to be successful you must:
 - a. Identify the barriers.
 - b. Plan a strategy and education to improve the environment.
 - c. Offer introductory sessions that help the target market overcome those barriers.
 - d. Make sure there are procedures and awareness in place to deal with any elements of prejudice in the sporting environment to ensure under-represented groups have a positive experience throughout their sporting journey.
20. This type of activity in the UK needs greater and more consistent support from the government, governing bodies, and media partners. It is largely volunteer led by people like me who have had to overcome prejudice, intolerance, barriers, bias and stereotyping in Sport. I am doing this as a volunteer to give young LGBTQI+ athletes a better experience in Sport than I had as a gay man working in tennis and following Football. I would also argue it also should be a temporary movement so that when all sports environments have balanced representation and all elements of prejudice have been consigned to history, we can disband.
21. Is the Government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in Sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?
22. Sport England commissioned their Pride Sports study in 2016 confessing that compared to other protected characteristics, 'data on the physical activity levels the LGBTQI+ community-and the sport they play-is less well-established.'
23. The Government's own National LGBT survey said 'a relatively small number of respondents discussed Sport.
24. I would argue that data is scant on LGBTQI+ participation in Sport. We have no breakdown of which Sports the community see as inclusive, and the comparisons between the male and female Sport environment. Most investigative work focuses on Men's professional Sport, rather than the experiences at grassroots level. My work in football has led me to discover that whilst most major football clubs now have better visibility and more robust reporting systems for racism, homophobia and other forms of hate speech, and most regional governing bodies have frameworks to report incidents in grassroots Sport, we have little accurate national data. In football, neither the Premier League, nor the FA collate national data around hate crime.

Organisations like Kick it Out collect some data but they are not supported as a reporting process by all clubs.

25. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and ableism in Sport be tackled?
26. The Government need to pass legislation requiring Sports governing bodies to collect and publish data around hate crime reports. Until then we cannot properly tackle the problems if we do not know the scale of the issue.
27. I chair the LGBTQI+ inclusive Newcastle United fans group United with Pride and in partnership with the club we continue to run visibility days, support local prides, offer a safe space for LGBTQI+ fans and report hate crime where we see it both in-stadium and online. We receive recognition and support from across the city and fan base. Since our work began the club has become a safer and more welcoming place for LGBTQI+ fans, staff, coaches, and players. We are one of approximately 35 active fans groups around UK football. This network (Pride in Football) gives us a voice in the media and with decision makers in the game to educate around being more inclusive and to tackle bigotry where we find it.
28. What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite Sport and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable?
29. In addition to better data collection and hate crime report collation, Sports governing bodies need to align their inclusion, equality, and diversity charters. The government could take a lead on this by increasing minimum requirements for Diversity and Inclusion work, encouraging Sports to collaborate by sharing examples of good practice when working to increase participation in under-represented groups. My experience in both Football and Tennis has led me to believe there is little consistency in the approach to Diversity and Inclusion. This may be in part due to a lack of training opportunities specific to Diversity and Inclusion in comparison to safeguarding, governance and management. Many activators and employees who work in the field of D&I in Sport have progressed into the role from other fields of study and experience, often without any D&I qualifications (because as far as I am aware, there are not any).
30. What successful policy interventions have other Countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities in Sport and recreation to lead more active lifestyles?
31. In Australia the local government, governing body, and LGBTQI+ network have worked together to run a showcase LGBTQI+ inclusive amateur event alongside the Australian Open in Melbourne park each year. This has led to a significant rise in participation by the LGBTQI+ community throughout Australia. This is the best example of how visibility in Sport can drive participation for a minority group when under-represented at professional level.
32. Should there be a national plan for Sport/recreation? Why?
33. Diversity and Inclusion work in Sport will continue to be a patchwork of sporadic work targeting some under-represented communities whilst ignoring others until the Government have a national framework for the identification through data across all Sports and across all protected characteristics. Then the Government can hold all Sports governing bodies to the same minimum requirements to address disparities.

34. My personal experiences in LGBTQI+ inclusion in football and tennis shows me that Rugby and Football do significantly more than Tennis, Golf or Cricket. I am confident if it were someone working in the field of increasing women's participation in basketball, BAME participation in Cricket, or the Jewish community to take up swimming, they would come across similar issues to those identified above.

Summary

35. The LGBTQI+ community needs to be encouraged to be more physically active to help tackle a mental health epidemic.

36. Increased participation in every aspect of the sport, (playing, coaching, watching, officiating) is what needs to be driven, in order to help our community achieve whatever their individual motives are: mental health, physical well-being, a sense of belonging, and support for the community.

37. Networks dedicated to supporting these under-represented communities in Sport can help with the solution along with better education in school around D+I in Sport.

38. Diversity and Inclusion initiatives need more financial support and more visibility promotion from the media and governing bodies.

39. A national blueprint set out by the government on hate crime reporting and minimum requirements for Diversity and Inclusion work to bring it closer to the regulations surrounding safeguarding.

40. More comprehensive data collection to help identify some of the specific problems within under-represented groups.

41. Until these issues are addressed, and Sport continues to make piece-meal token-gesture efforts towards Diversity and Inclusion, we will continue to have severe under-representation in professional Sport.

42. Across the 100-year history of all major sports, you can count on one hand the number of male athletes who competed as openly gay or bi individuals. If you consider that it is estimated that 7% of the male population is likely to identify as something other than heterosexual, then it shows the scale of the challenge on our hands to make sport a more inclusive environment.

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