

Mermaids and Stonewall – Written evidence (NPS0123)

Introduction

1. Stonewall and Mermaids are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. LGBT+ people are under-represented in all areas of sport & recreation, including elite and professional sport, grassroots sport, fitness & physical activity, and sports spectatorship and support. It is vital that the needs of LGBT+ people are represented in national plans for sport and recreation.
2. Stonewall is Britain's largest organisation campaigning for LGBT+ equality. Stonewall conducts and commissions original and innovative research into LGBT+ people's needs and experiences. Stonewall's Sport Team works with a range of organisations to create LGBT+ inclusive sporting environments to get more people active and, via sport's reach, change attitudes in other areas of society. We coordinate the Rainbow Laces campaign which has success over 7 years in making sport everyone's game.
3. Mermaids are one of the UK's leading LGBTQ+ charities. Mermaids supports transgender, nonbinary and gender-diverse children and young people until their 20th birthday, as well as their families and professionals involved in their care. We empower thousands of people with our secure online communities, local community groups, helpline services, web resources, events and residential weekends.

Q2: How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

4. Research into the experiences of LGBT+ children and young people consistently finds that young people are put off from engaging in sport and recreation due to experiencing homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic (HBT) bullying, discrimination, and harassment. When instances of HBT bullying, discrimination or harassment are not consistently or adequately addressed, it discourages LGBT+ young people from taking part in sport.
5. Stonewall's School Report (2017) found that:
 - One in seven LGBT pupils (14 per cent) – including three in ten trans pupils (29 per cent) – are bullied during sports lessons.
 - More than half of LGBT pupils (54 per cent) 'frequently' or 'often' hear homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language in sports lessons.
6. National Union of Students research into LGBT students experience of sport (Out in Sport, 2012) found that:
 - 47 per cent of LGBT students who do not participate in sport find the culture around sport alienating or unwelcoming.

- 42 per cent had a negative experience at school which has meant that they don't want to get involved at college or university.
 - 14 per cent had experienced homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia which has put them off from participating.
7. As highlighted in this research, many LGBT young people do not believe they can participate in sports. Many sports or recreation clubs and groups are not visibly inclusive, LGBT-inclusive sporting groups are not widely advertised, and there is a glaring lack of LGBT+ sports role models for young people, especially trans and non-binary role models.
 8. Trans, non-binary and gender-diverse children and young people experience additional barriers which dissuade and prevent them from participating in sport and recreation, both at school and outside school. These barriers include a lack of understanding and awareness around the needs of trans, non-binary and gender-diverse young people, as well as practical barriers around availability of appropriate sports kit and changing facilities.
 9. Stonewall's LGBT in Britain: University Report (2018) highlights some of the specific barriers trans people face in accessing sport.':

"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."

- A, 22 (London)

Recommendations:

10. National LGBT+-inclusive policies in sport, alongside LGBT+ inclusion guidance for schools and community sports groups, are needed to break down the barriers discussed above, and to encourage LGBT+ young people to participate in sport and recreation, inside and outside of school.
11. We also recommend the implementation of zero tolerance policies around HBT hate speech, bullying and harassment, by other young people, their parents and sports staff, and an understanding of how such discrimination can negatively affect a young person's mental health which can impact their engagement with sports.
12. Specific policies that would break down barriers for trans and gender-diverse young people include the provision of inclusive changing facilities, and gender-neutral sportswear (or flexibility in rules about appropriate sportswear) that take into account trans and non-binary young people's needs and comfort.
13. Visible LGBT+ sports role models would be enormously beneficial to encourage young LGBT+ people to see themselves participating and being successful in sports.

"Having more role models and visibility of trans people in sport would help. Especially in more stereotyped sports."
Mermaids focus group participant (Nov 2020).

Q3: How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

14. LGBT+ people have pronounced physical and mental health needs for which an active lifestyle can be beneficial to prevent poorer health outcomes. Stonewall's research, LGBT in Britain: Health (2017), shows that in the 12 months preceding the survey, half of LGBT+ people said they experienced depression, rising to 55 per cent and 70 per cent for women and non-binary people respectively.
15. However, the importance of an active lifestyle does not translate into action. Research by the National LGB&T Partnership found, that 55 per cent of LGBT men were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 33 per cent of men in the general population, with these figures rising to 56 per cent and 45 per cent respectively for LGBT women. This figure rose further to 60 per cent for trans people, and 64 per cent for people who do not identify as male or female.
16. One reason for this is that LGBT+ people do not feel welcome in sport. Stonewall's annual Rainbow Laces campaign, aimed at improving LGBT+ people's experiences of sport, revealed that 43 per cent of LGBT+ people think public sporting events are not a welcome space for LGBT+ people, with one in three trans people having been discriminated against while exercising at a fitness club or taking part in group sport last year.

"I played netball at school and wanted to play at university, but at Fresher's Fair the players talked so much about their socials with various boys' teams. They may have been nice but my first impression was that only straight girls played netball here, and I'm not that. So I didn't play."

Rainbow Laces case study participant, (2019)

17. For LGBT+ people of colour, the lack of representation at all levels of sport can be an inhibiting factor, with the challenging reality of experiencing racism alongside homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Even within LGBT+ spaces, half of LGBT+ people of colour face discrimination, as Stonewall's research shows (2017).

"I'm often the only brown face in a white space, and being the only one within a group that navigates the world in a certain way can feel isolating and tiring."

Rainbow Laces case study participant (2020)

18. The National Union of Students 'Out in Sport' (2012) study shows that university and college students had similar experiences of exclusion, with almost half finding the culture around sport alienating or unwelcoming. Two in five had a negative experience at school which led to a lack of involvement at college or university, demonstrating that exclusion from sport from an early age leads to less active lifestyles (see Question 2). The study also found that:
- 19 per cent of university and college students were put off by gendered sports teams, with this rising to 39 per cent for trans people.
19. For health outcomes and participation to improve, it is vital that LGBT+ people not only feel welcome in their sport, but have specific provisions in place for their needs.

Recommendations:

20. Ensuring knowledge of and access to LGBT+ inclusive sport clubs can improve the chance of maintaining an active lifestyle. As the National LGB&T partnership notes, LGBT+ people who were members of sports clubs were twice as likely (76 per cent) to meet the national recommendations for physical activity, compared with LGBT+ people who were not members of sports clubs. This shows the power of providing LGBT+ inclusive spaces to encourage more active lifestyles.
21. Inclusive guidance needs to be produced on a national scale, highlighting examples of best practice across a range of sports and contexts, to then be shared with sports groups, fitness, leisure and recreation centres, and organisations around the country. An example of inclusive guidance is LEAP Sports 'Non-binary inclusion in sport' booklet (September 2020), which explains some of the challenges non-binary individuals face in sport spaces, as well as providing examples of success stories. One such success story is Limitless, which is a competition based on 'strength athletics' which is all-gender inclusive.

Q5: 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. There are improvements to be made in the government's data collection efforts to accurately capture a picture of how LGBT+ people participate in sport and recreation activities. This is part of a larger need to accurately and consistently monitor and report on LGBT+ identities in national statistics, as called for in the LGBT Action Plan (2018).
23. There is currently a lack of data around how LGBT+ participate in school sports. Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (2021) does not provide any data or information on LGBT+ young people and their experiences of activity. Furthermore, the data collected only

captures binary identities, in its focus on the experiences of girls versus boys.

24. By not adequately collecting data on trans, non-binary and gender-diverse young people's sporting experiences, these young people's voices are not being heard. This is reflected in the lack of awareness sporting spaces have on how to support trans and non-binary young people, and how to encourage them to participate in sports and activity.
25. We welcome the government introducing a national requirement for NGBs to collect data on the experiences of LGBT+ people in sports and recreation.

Q6: How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

26. LGBT+ communities are diverse, and experiences of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia can be compounded by experiences of racism, misogyny and ableism.
27. Given that Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey (2020) focuses on the impact of sport and physical activity in bringing people together, building trust and reducing isolation, it is disconcerting that LGBT+ people expect to face discrimination in sporting environments. Stonewall's research found, that:
 - Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT+ people were twice as likely (18 per cent) to experience discrimination on the basis of their orientation and/or gender identity at a sporting event compared to all LGBT+ people.
 - Two in five trans people avoid going to the gym or participating in sports groups compared to one in eight LGBT+ people.
28. Changing facilities can cause profound distress for LGBT+ people of all ages and backgrounds. This can be especially difficult for those who feel vulnerable to questioning on the basis of their identity, such as disabled LGBT+ people who are accompanied by a carer. One participant in Stonewall's research, said:

"The girls from my spin class in my gym will no longer change at the gym with me since they found out I was attracted to girls. They said that they thought it was dishonest of me not to mention it the very first time we were all changing and that it was creepy and uncomfortable, even though I have had a partner for five years and assured them I wasn't going to hit on them."

Participant in Stonewall's LGBT in Britain: Hate Crime and Discrimination research (2017)
29. The Proud Trust's report, Including LGBT Young People in Sport, highlights that a large number of LGBTQ+ young people are made to change in alternative facilities, away from communal spaces, and one of the reasons

for this is that “teachers were unsure how to deal with young transgender people”. In the majority of cases, “young LGB people felt that they were seen as either potential victims if they were boys, or sexual predators if they were girls”.

30. Not only does this experience of transphobia, homophobia and biphobia cause the young person distress and negatively affect their mental health, it has other long-term consequences (see Question 2).

Recommendations:

31. All sports clubs, leisure facilities and gyms should introduce (and revise existing) zero tolerance policies of high quality, focusing on preventing bullying and harassment. These policies must outline specific examples of what homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, misogyny, racism, and ableism look like within sporting contexts, and mechanisms to address them by centring the needs of those affected.
32. These policies must extend beyond sport grounds, in both offline and digital spaces, for example, changing rooms and WhatsApp groups, where bullying, discrimination and harassment takes place.
33. National governing bodies should increase LGBT+ participation across sport at grassroots and professional levels by promoting guidance on tackling anti-LGBT+ abuse, accompanied with thorough training for coaches and officials at all levels.
34. For all LGBT+ people to be included in sporting spaces, these policies, guidance and training programmes must take an intersectional approach, recognising how being a disabled lesbian, or a Black non-binary person, may lead to someone experiencing more than one form of discrimination at a time.
35. Sport can be a safe space, and a vehicle for teaching the importance of LGBT+ inclusion, where people are able to meet those who are not like themselves but share a common passion.

“Not playing sport really affected my health [so] I decided to play rugby again.... I was comfortable about telling people I was gay and no one made a judgement.”
- Out on the Fields Report 2015

Q10: Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

36. Mermaids and Stonewall recommend that there is a national plan for inclusion policies in sport to ensure that there is national consistency across all stakeholders as to what best practice looks like. These national strategies for ensuring everyone can participate in sport and recreation

should include access to education and training as well as shared best practice guidelines and policies for inclusive sport and recreation.

37. For example, a national plan for inclusion would help to combat much of the misleading and inaccurate information around trans and non-binary people's participation in sports.
38. World Rugby's decision to exclude trans women from participating in women's rugby on the international level without proper consultation with NGBs shows the impact of misinformation on governing bodies' decision making. International Gay Rugby called the policy a "direct and active discrimination against transgender athletes", and the Rugby Football Union decided that more evidence was needed before implementing the ban domestically.
39. A national plan for inclusion would ensure there is accountability for LGBT+ inclusion policies in sport, at all levels of sporting activity. This cohesion would act as a reassurance and safety net for LGBT+ young people to encourage them to participate and to demonstrate to them that they can have a future in sports.

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