

Being LGBT+ at Work

LGBT+ Workplace Experiences 2023



Acknowledgements

Thank you to Zoe Tyndall, the researcher who completed the research contained in this report. We would like to thank everyone who took part in the research and shared their stories with us.

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Forewords

Everyone should be safe, equal and respected at work. We at the TUC wanted to look beneath the headlines and see the everyday experiences of being LGBT+ at work in 2023 - to help us run better campaigns and support union reps all over the UK to represent their LGBT+ members. I want to thank everyone who shared their stories with us.

This report shows that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are still very real in the workplace. It was sobering to read about the prevailing low expectations of the workplace amongst LGBT+ people. Too many told us they feel grateful when basic standards are met, when that is the least they should be able to expect.

Safety and dignity at work are about having strong rules and policies - but also they are about having strong norms about acceptable behaviour at work, to create an inclusive culture. We still need government action to protect LGBT+ workers from harassment by clients and customers, and to act on the low pay and insecure work that disproportionately affects LGBT+ workers. And we need leadership from employers to build inclusive workplaces where everyone can be themselves.

It was heartening to read about the support some participants have received from their unions - but we are not complacent. My priority as general secretary is to build a stronger and more diverse trade union movement. That means making sure the union movement is a welcoming place for LGBT+ members, and making sure reps know how homophobia, biphobia and transphobia play out at work and are confident to challenge it.

Every LGBT+ worker needs a union, and unions are proud to act as allies in solidarity with the LGBT+ community.

Paul Nowak, TUC General Secretary

As the TUC's first out LGBT+ President, I welcome this important and sobering report.

In my lifetime, the world of work has changed immeasurably for LGBT+ people - in no small part due to the efforts of trade unions and trade unionists. But as this report shows, there is far more that needs to happen to ensure safety and dignity for all LGBT+ people at work.

This follows on from previous TUC research that has exposed the scale bullying, discrimination, and harassment, including sexual harassment, that LGBT+ workers face - and tells the stories of the real people behind the statistics.

As trade unionists we strive for workplaces that are free from prejudice, where everyone is free to be themselves. And that is why it is such a grave concern that trans inclusion in our workplaces may be going backwards.

Employers and unions must be brave and step up to build inclusive workplace cultures where everyone is treated with respect - against the background of a manufactured moral panic, a cost-of-living crisis, and a government that is hell-bent on stripping away workers' rights.

There is still much to do. Let's get to it.

Maria Exall, TUC President 2022-23

Please note this report includes offensive comments shared with us with the consent of research participants to illustrate their experiences of being LGBT+ in the workplace. Resources for help and support can be found at the end of this report. Participants' names have been changed.

Executive summary

The TUC conducted this research to investigate the extent to which the progress of recent decades in embedding formal legal protections for LGBT+ workers has translated into positive and inclusive experiences of the workplace. What we found was worrying: despite LGBT+ workers being protected by law from discrimination, harassment and bullying, too many still experienced the workplace as a negative or even harmful.

This research was qualitative: we wanted to dig beneath the surface of statistics and try to understand the reality of life being out as LGBT+ at work now. We were particularly keen to hear directly from people who are active in their trade unions, in order to help union reps and activists understand the issues and make sure they are ready to support LGBT+ members.

Many of the LGBT+ people we interviewed reflected that they have seen progress - although homophobia and biphobia are by no means extinct in the workplace. The LGBT+ workers we spoke to had low expectations, considering themselves fortunate when basic legal standards are met. It was noticeable that recruitment was a point of particular tension and worry: even those happy to be out in the workplace said they would definitely hide their identity when applying for a new role.

There was consensus among our interviewees that trans and non-binary staff face the greatest challenges in the workplace. Many felt that progress on trans inclusion in the workplace was going backwards. Many interviewees cited the toxic narratives about LGBT+ people that are prevalent in the media, believing that this climate is affecting LGBT+ experiences at work.

From the interviews, it was clear that inclusive workplace policies are necessary but not sufficient to create workplace change, and that culture is slower to improve. Acts of harm are very likely to go unreported to employers as they believe little will be done. Many described discriminatory and bullying experiences such as being outed by colleagues or being persistently misgendered - but said they would be very unlikely to make a complaint.

Overall, interviewees were positive about unions (as you would expect from a sample recruited through union networks with higher union membership than the general population). There was, however, some concern that unions and union reps may not have an up-to-date understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation issues. Some interviewees said that they might not approach their union for support with

issues related to being an LGBT+ worker. There were also some examples of historic unsupportive practice by union reps cited.

A number of interviews focussed on the impact of employer-led diversity and inclusion networks (sometimes called LGBT+ networks, employee resource groups or affinity groups). Whilst these are very welcome sources of support and representation, interviewees reflected that these networks are dependent on workplace culture, and time to participate in these networks is not protected. We also note that, unlike unions, employee resource groups and networks exist at the whim of management and do not have an independent status.

The core conclusion of this research was the importance for employers and unions of focusing on building inclusive cultures at work. Managers in all workplaces need to actively, consciously and consistently create inclusive cultures, set behavioural expectations for everyone, and stamp out discrimination and bullying. This will create stronger, more successful organisations, with benefits for customers and clients too.

Research methodology

The TUC wanted to understand the experiences of LGBT+ workers in today's workplaces, to develop recommendations for both policy change and practical actions that unions could take. We therefore took a qualitative approach, asking LGBT+ workers to answer a screening survey and then approaching a smaller sample to take part in more in-depth interviews.

We conducted 16 interviews. The interviews provided a relatively diverse - though not representative - group of respondents from across the UK, and of different ages, genders, LGBT+ identities, ethnicities, and across a range of job roles and sectors. Interviewees were more likely than the population as a whole to be members of, or reps in a union.

The interviews focused on the following key areas:

- **Ability to be your whole self at work.** The culture and environment in workplaces, and interactions not just with colleagues but also customers and service users; the public stances an employer takes on LGBT+ issues, and the impact this has on staff
- **Policy vs practice.** The way on-the-ground behaviours of management and staff align with or contradict formal policy.
- **Experiences of job seeking and new roles.** The experiences of LGBT+ workers during and confidence in recruitment processes, and the experience of coming out (or not) to new employers.
- **Bullying, discrimination and harassment,** particularly for trans and non-binary people.
- **Transphobia specifically,** and how it intersects with other forms of oppression and discrimination.
- **Allyship and education.** Where is energy and impetus for positive change coming from? What role do unions play in this and what more could they do?

It should be noted that those who took part in this research were self-selecting. Those keen to speak to a researcher tend not to be those with the most difficult experiences.

Findings

1. Improvements over time, and low expectations

Most respondents felt things are generally improving for gay and bi workers who are not trans.

Older LGBT+ workers in particular looking back over several decades of experience were very positive about the direction of travel. One of the most significant changes they described was the ability to be out at work, even despite the homophobia and biphobia they received.

"The top line is - it's nothing like it used to be. When I was training to be a teacher back in the 90s, the person assessing me looked me dead in the eye and said, "Look, I'm never going to pass you - I don't want your sort around children. I'm a headteacher and an Ofsted inspector - you don't hear about gay men hearing that sort of thing these days."
Henry, headteacher

"I'd see some people I worked with out on the scene in Leeds, and we'd chat, but would absolutely never acknowledge it in the newsroom. I don't think the younger generation now appreciates how different it was." Andrew, journalist

This is not to say that homophobia or biphobia have disappeared from workplaces - interviewees could all easily recall recent instances, including many which would constitute gross misconduct. As well as homophobia and biphobia from colleagues, interviewees also reflected on the behaviour of customers or service users in their places of work and the response of their employer.

"Even before I was out to anyone - my headteacher said to me "no one would ever say it, but if you look like a lesbian, you're not going to get a job in a primary school". People don't guess that I'm gay, so I hear the homophobia all the time. I just can't believe it - I'm like - you're just telling me how happy you are to break the law." Layla, teacher

Biphobia

Biphobia was often discussed - by bi staff, and reps with experience supporting bi staff - as a real, and often growing issue in workplaces. Ella, a work coach with the DWP, discussed her experiences of biphobia when her colleagues, who had assumed she was gay, realised she was bi (see case study number 4).

Low expectations

One of the themes emerging from the research was that LGBT+ workers have very low expectations about how they should be treated at work. This meant that many respondents described basic equality, or the lack of harassment, as “very lucky”.

A headteacher told us they were “*very lucky to never have experienced bullying here*”. A trans engineer in a nuclear power plant said, “*the last time I was misgendered was about three years ago - I almost feel guilty, for how easy I’ve had it here*”.

A physiotherapist wrote “*I have been fortunate enough to have a senior leader who identifies as LGBT. I know that if this wasn’t the case I feel I would have a negative experience, and always lived with a slight fear.*”

A train driver told us “*My experience as a gay man has been overall very good. I’ve never experienced any direct discrimination. However, I have been subject to name calling and negative language.*”

Intersectionality

A lot of the interviewees reflected on the intersectionality of their experiences. Many white interviewees reflected that their experiences must have been easier than they would have had, were they BME - and made direct comparisons with how they’ve seen their BME colleagues and union members treated.

BME people were more likely to have had negative experiences, specifically the intersection of multiple discriminations.

“I’m currently unemployed, but the previous company I worked in didn’t end up well for me, I was abused - verbally and racially too - basically from, my POV, mainly the LGBTQ status.” Vee, hospitality

“I get parents on the phone, not realising I’m mixed race, so they say things they wouldn’t say otherwise. You get this insight into how people think. It’s the same as my sexuality - they don’t assume I’m gay - so you hear it all coming out. I’m always very calm these days - I just ask “tell me a little bit more about that - I don’t understand what you mean”. Mark, headteacher

Disabled interviewees reflected on how they experience mental distress or neurodivergence alongside their LGBT+ identities:

“Because she [my manager] gets my pronouns right, I trust her to understand my neurodivergence too. My old manager didn’t care about either.” Billie, call centre worker

"Before transitioning - I was very ill at that time. But actually I got very well supported - I could go and ask for the support, the time off - and they took me seriously. Because I was seen as a straight white man." Cathy, civil servant

2. Trans experiences

There was broad consensus across interviewees that progress on trans rights is not only slow, but may even be going backwards.

Every single interviewee said that the biggest issue facing the LGBT+ community in the workplace is the transphobia experienced by trans and non-binary people.

Interviewees described the lack of confidence of their colleagues and employers in talking about, or even understanding trans and non-binary identities. There were some examples of trans inclusive workplace cultures but these were the minority.

Expectations are so low that employers who are supportive of trans and non-binary staff are seen as examples of exceptional practice, rather than organisations that are fulfilling their basic equalities requirements as employers.

Many spoke about the media narrative around trans issues - noting how the equivalence given to anti-trans views in many areas of public debate filters down to workplaces, with managers unaware of their legal responsibilities.

Many interviewees had been out at work as gay or bi for some time before transitioning and directly contrasted how they were treated as a gay cis person vs a trans person. Similarly reps with a lot of casework experience drew a very clear distinction between employment practice around sexuality vs gender identity.

"But the biphobia [I've experienced at work] is nothing compared to what my trans and non-binary colleagues experience. As an equalities rep, I've supported a lot of people. Someone who was referred to as "it" in the office by colleagues." Ella, work coach

"The managers assume people are trans warriors - that if they've decided to transition then they're totally fine, confident, ready, it's easy. And for the staff - it's hard to show that uncertainty, the turmoil, the everything that they're feeling. So the managers' view is - just get on with your work. My role is to help the managers understand how my members are feeling, help them think about the right questions to ask. Managers wrongly believe that when someone asks to be referred to by a new name - that's the end of the journey. They don't understand it's the start." Sandra, retail

"The big problem for me is the false equivalence that comes from the media at the moment. Not enough people in my workplace understand that equality on the basis of gender identity is a legally protected right. There's this sense - well if Susan thinks I'm a man, then her right to call me a man is protected. This - there's 'two sides to the debate' thing." Cathy, civil servant

3. Workplace policies

In terms of how employers and unions should support people of all LGBT+ identities, it is very clear that having appropriate policy is necessary but not sufficient.

Most interviewees said that their employer broadly has the right policies and procedures in place when it comes to their legal commitments to equality for LGBT+ staff.

Most had a transitioning at work policy - though often these have been published only in the last few years.

There are clear themes of areas where staff and reps don't think formal workplace policies are sufficient:

- Facilities was a big theme - with too many trans and nonbinary staff being left to use accessible toilets for disabled people as a default, in the absence of gender neutral toilets or a clear and confident policy.
- Retail staff and teachers in schools described unnecessarily gendered uniforms or dress policies.
- Some workers felt their organisations needed to improve their range of gender options and pronouns on forms.
- There were some areas where interviewees felt that their employment terms and conditions could be more generous - for example, the amount of paid leave offered to cover medical procedures whilst transitioning.

"They're getting there with the uniforms - it was easy for me to switch. But honestly - do our fleeces need to be termed male and female? It's just that one is fitted and one isn't. Lots of the women prefer wearing the men's ones anyway. We could just get rid of that so easily." Emmanuel, delivery driver

"Toilets are key - I don't want to get stereotypical - I transitioned in 1998 so believe me, I've been having this conversation longer than most. But honestly - just have gender neutral facilities." Jess, civil servant

"I guess I didn't get paid sick leave for all the time I had to take off [to transition] - I took half of it as holiday. That could have been different." Hugo, nuclear engineer

Interviewees were clear that having an appropriate set of workplace policies is not enough - it is culture that drives real change (see section 7 for more).

Most interviewees felt that the culture of their workplace was a crucial factor in their risk of discrimination and/or harassment. The most common harms which people described included being 'outed' by colleagues, or being persistently misgendered. Many people also described the challenge that lazy language and assumptions by

colleagues has on them - assumptions about the gender of their partner; or intrusive or offensive questions about their personal lives.

"There is just this 'eurgh' when people ask what my husband does and I have to correct to: my wife. It's just a constant thing in the background. As a freelancer, you're coming out all the time." Heather, costume designer in film industry

"It's the constant comments about - you don't know what it's like, you don't have children. You are always going out. When we've been booking holiday - I've had "you haven't got any children, so we need to prioritise the other colleagues first." Holly, NHS,

"Managers without even thinking will just say to new staff: "you've got Emmanuel on your team, they're transgender." I have started saying to people now I'm more confident - "what are you doing, you just outed me?" They laugh it off, like it's a joke, but I say - no, this is serious. This is people who think they're great allies - they think just because I call Emmanuel he / him, I'm fantastic. But simple misgendering, they don't realise how harmful it is." Emmanuel, delivery driver

"I've been asked how we have sex, by colleagues, in the staff room. I was shocked - it was all so new to me." Layla, teacher

"The problem is often the management - they try to make it inclusive, but they don't get all the little things right. And those are big things sometimes. I remember when me and my husband were buying a house in the 90s. Amazingly at the time you had to have a clean HIV test - because they just assumed we were all about to croak it. Anyway one bank decided they'd be the first to abandon this - and we were the first couple to get a mortgage through them. They got a TV crew in and filmed it live on air - us sitting with the clerk, giving over our details. And as it was happening - the clerk, her face just went whiter and whiter and she just creaked to a halt, on air. It turned out their computer system wouldn't let her input two "Mr"s in. Very embarrassing - of course for us, we saw that sort of thing on forms all the time, but no one in their office had realised. God, we laughed". Henry, headteacher

4. The role of diversity and inclusion networks

Diversity and inclusion networks are on the rise - particularly since the pandemic - but don't offer the same protections that unions do.

Many organisations had created or revived diversity and inclusion/LGBT+ networks (sometimes called affinity groups or employee resource groups) in recent years. Lots of interviewees spoke about these networks positively - that they are hugely beneficial spaces to support and be supported. On the whole, women's groups were experienced as trans inclusive.

"Oh the networks are so important - when I think now how much easier it would have been to transition in the 90s, if we'd had that sort of space at work. I've seen people flourish - they tend to present as an ally first, join the group, then come out. To be able to be out at work - it changes people - so much fuller and more lively. The chair of our network hadn't even told his manager he was married to a man before the group was set up." Jess, civil servant

Interviewees raised two main limitations of diversity and inclusion networks.

Firstly - they are optional, so tend to reflect the culture that already exists. Interviewees reflected that such networks existing in the first place depends on workplace culture and that employee networks exist at the whim of management. If there is good representation of LGBT+ people in senior management teams, and an inclusive culture, it tends to be the case that the employer makes time and space for a strong LGBT+ network. This creates a virtuous cycle that reinforces the inclusive culture..

However, where diversity and inclusion isn't a priority in the workplace, management teams are unlikely to create space for these networks - so those staff who need them most are unlikely to benefit from them.

Secondly, the time staff invest in these networks is neither protected nor paid.

There were some instances of employers using these networks to supplement proper diversity and inclusion policy roles, and many commented that they feel they're asked to do a lot of unremunerated work, on top of their other roles. Some interviewees also described experiencing pressure to share their personal stories in the workplace.

"Our LGBT network - it's essentially a staff support network, for visibility, community. But when it came to writing a trans policy for the sports clubs we represent, suddenly our group was being asked to write this, all fitting around our day jobs. I just thought - this is complex, important policy work - it should be being done by a policy team you're confident in, not farmed out to all of the trans and nonbinary staff to do on top of everything else." Luke, civil servant

"Initially there was a proper space made for D&I [diversity and inclusion]. There was a group of us in a little LGBT network, seven of us, and we had time off our core duties to do presentations, training, etc. Now with all the budget cuts and the pressure - it's all been cut. Now there's nobody at all doing D&I." Ella, work coach

"The only other challenge I've had is that sometimes I did feel like I was being paraded. As soon as the head office found out about me, they were inviting me up there, could I be in a magazine, could I run this campaign, and on and on." Emmanuel, delivery driver

"I think space for diversity and inclusion work [in the LGBT+ network] should be explicitly protected in your job description... It's not consistent or explicit at the moment and it puts a lot of people off. Union reps get protected paid time to do their work, and protection from discrimination for it. It should be the same for the equalities networks." Hugo, mechanical engineer

It is important that network groups work closely with trade unions, and make the most of protected facility time, and bargaining rights.

"I don't really see the LGBT+ networks in retailers that much - or I don't see them having a big impact for the staff on the ground. It's the unions that make a difference - we have that space to properly get to know our members. It's only when you have those proper, whole, deep relationships, that you can properly support people doing something as complex as transitioning." Sandra, retail

5. Perspectives on unions

The role of unions is seen as generally positive

People were generally very positive about the role of their unions.

Interviewees felt union leadership has the same responsibility as employers - to clearly set a culture of inclusivity from the top and quickly and effectively stamp out bigotry.

Interviewees described unions as a place to meet other LGBT+ staff and, on the whole, very supportive allies to LGBT+ staff.

"Sometimes we put too much emphasis on - we're fighting for you. When you're transitioning - sometimes the last thing you want is a fight. Sometimes you need to hear - we're sitting alongside you. It's not always a fight." Hugo, nuclear engineer

Unions offered to many people a chance to come out to a smaller and safer group of colleagues, before the whole workplace.

Willingness to raise grievances

There was some hesitancy amongst interviewees about whether some of the harms they experience in the workplace are genuine grievances, and a question over whether they'd get their union involved or not.

For example, most people who had been outed in the workplace (around a quarter of interviewees) didn't think this was the basis for a legitimate complaint, and didn't discuss it with union reps or with HR. Even those who had experienced quite significant discriminatory treatment were unwilling to involve their union - either because of a sense of not wanting the spotlight on them, or because they just didn't believe the union would be able to achieve anything.

"My wife and I have been waiting 3 years for a fertility appointment with the NHS. It's finally coming next month, but we're both going to be in Prague on set for a job. We can't miss it, I don't know how long it would take to get another. I haven't checked my contract or with the union for what we're entitled to, no. There's no way I'd make a formal request to protect the time off, or come in banging the union drum. We'll just wait until nearer the time and then talk to our supervisor about making the time back. I know it sounds a bit crazy for something so important, but that's just how our industry works - it's all people and culture, it's not about terms and conditions." Heather, costume designer in film industry

"I didn't really know anything about unions before I joined but someone told me to join. When that happened with my old manager, I didn't think there was much point talking to

the union - I felt they wouldn't care or actually I felt like they wouldn't even know how to handle it. That was rather worrying - they don't really advertise very much awareness about gender identity issues. I didn't consider going to HR either." Billie, call centre

"I had a pretty positive experience coming out as trans in my workplace - I guess there was a bit of a question about how much sick leave I could take for my surgery. I didn't really push. I could have asked the union for support actually - it didn't really occur to me at the time. In hindsight, it might have been useful to have a rep sitting there with me in the meetings, picking up things you might forget. It's all so intense during that period."
Hugo, nuclear engineer

6. Experiences of recruitment

Particularly for trans and non-binary staff, there is a glass ceiling

Evidence of persistent discrimination is most obvious when interviewees described the process of looking for new roles. The majority of interviewees were very clear that they wouldn't come out during a recruitment process unless they had to.

"I have a rainbow lanyard - mostly to show allyship to parents and kids. But I feel terrible and really self-conscious, that when I've done interviews, I've taken it off. I feel terrible about doing that because I know what I've needed most is better allies." Layla, deputy headteacher

"I would never be open about my identity as a trans woman in a recruitment process. Never have been in 25 years, but I definitely wouldn't be in the current climate. Absolutely never in an interview... If I can hide my identity, I definitely will." Jess, civil servant.

"I'm always very clear with my identity even at the point where I was applying for jobs. I always give my pronouns and they're all there in my email footer. Of all the interviews I did - I must have applied to 25 jobs that summer - not one person ever acknowledged it or used them." Billie, call centre worker

Glass ceiling

The low expectations that many trans and non binary staff have of their employers can create an inadvertent glass ceiling. Many of those who have good bosses, teams and workplace cultures feel very lucky to have them, and are not confident it would be replicated elsewhere. They described being unwilling to look for or go for promotions or new roles, because of not wanting to "take a risk" on a new manager.

"If I was thinking about moving to a different role in the hospital, I'd definitely suss out whether the manager was bigoted or not. I'm really lucky now - my manager is an older straight cis guy, but he's just - I call it unconsciously inclusive. Nothing feels forced by him. I don't know how many other managers in the hospital would make me feel so at ease." Louis, clinical pharmacist

"I've definitely left schools quickly when they didn't feel inclusive or supportive. I was at a big, mixed school in the 90s and it was very obvious I wouldn't be able to be myself there. I only lasted two years. I was a bit more discerning about where I went after that." Henry,

primary school headteacher

7. Creating inclusive cultures

Thinking about solutions, interviewees focused on what creates positive, open, inclusive culture in the workplace

Interviewees were also very clear that appropriate workplace policies are not enough on their own, and that culture has a big impact.

"All the big retailers - they do have the policies in place now. It's been recent but they do have them. The problem is it's all lip service - you can see the managers don't get it - there's no human embodiment of these values." Sandra, retail

Interviewees described what an inclusive culture and practice looks and feels like:

- Consistent and swift action taken against bullying and harassment.
- Clear statements from management setting out support of the LGBT+ community.
- Representation - a workplace where a lot of people are able to be out creates a virtuous cycle where more people may feel comfortable coming out.
- A culture of openness, where it is okay to ask questions respectfully, rather than allowing a build-up of fear and misunderstanding
- Space for diversity and inclusion initiatives, working closely with trade unions - such as LGBT+ networks sponsored by senior individuals, talks and trainings delivered by people with a range of identities.
- Proactive space given to gender inclusivity: eg having the option of 'Mx' title on systems and forms options to share pronouns.

"Setting culture is all about clarity of standards and expectations. You have to be completely consistent as a leader - you have to call it all the time. People - staff, pupils, parents, governors - they're looking at you all the time. If they see there's an issue, and you don't address it, that's the standards you've set broken." Mark, headteacher

"You've got to get people over their nervousness. We have senior people who are very explicitly willing to listen and learn. One director - if he gets my pronouns wrong, he doesn't get defensive or flustered. He apologises and moves on. If you've got lots of capital in the organisation, it's easier to do - but having that tone - that's how you support all staff to get better". Luke, civil servant

"You set and change culture in so many ways. I see customers eyeing up the staff on the tills. If they see someone presenting as LGBT+, as something they're not comfortable with, they try to switch queues. I'm looking for it because my teams tell me it happens. So when I see it - I go up to them, I'm very clear and polite - you go to the next available cashier. If the customer refuses I say - sorry you'll have to go to the back of the queue. That's how

you set culture - small things, very consistent." Sandra, retail

"We had a teacher of a reception class who told me that she wanted to transition. We had all the nonsense under the sun from sections of parents. The only way to manage it is to really spend the time with everyone who's got a problem - get them into your office, get down to the bottom of it. What are you actually worried about here? When you dig down it's just an uncertainty about something they don't understand." Henry, primary school headteacher

8. Customers and service users

Interviewees also reflected that inclusive cultures don't just benefit staff - they improve services for customers and service users too.

LGBT+ workers didn't just focus on their organisation as an employer, when considering how inclusive it is. They thought about their organisations in the round. For example, those working in the media were just as interested in the news output their employer creates, as they were in the way their HR teams support them personally.

Many felt that if they were comfortable being out in the workplace, they could better support LGBT+ customers or service users. Many interviewees reflected that being able to be their whole self at work means they are happy, productive, loyal to the organisation and able to do well and progress.

"I think because my team and my boss make it so comfortable to be out, and there's so much representation, I've found it easier to challenge some of those things. We were working with some consultants on a new ICT project, and I checked in with my manager about whether I could interject to add better questions in, about gender identities to the patient forms. He was very supportive, and now we have much better experience for patients because of that. So I can see how inclusion makes things better for the patients as well as for us." Louis, clinical pharmacist

"When I took on this role [headteacher of a Church of England primary school], the local paper wrote an article - they must have mentioned my husband about ten times in this short piece. It's meant lots of gay staff have come to work for me. It enables us to really support our children - we've chosen a very inclusive PSHE curriculum. Representation and culture are really clear in the staff room." Henry, primary school headteacher

"Being proactive is key. We don't have any children outwardly questioning their gender in my school. But I want to get out ahead of the gender-neutral toilets conversation now - so when we do have that first child, it's not on them. I sat my SLT down, and we'd made a list of all the pushback we'd get from parents, and how we're going to head each one off." Mark, headteacher

Finally, there was a very strong sense of solidarity across the LGBT+ community from interviewees. Especially amongst the younger generation, there was a strong sense that lesbian, gay and bi people have a responsibility to act as strong allies for trans and non-binary colleagues, at work and in wider society.

"I do think we all have a responsibility as queer people to make sure this changes - we do all have a role. My industry is terrible for that - it's all good with your standard lesbians and gays but new gender identities is a stretch too far for people." Heather, film industry

"I feel pessimistic, looking forwards. We as trans people are being used as a wedge issue. They're chipping away at our rights - and I say our as a community - they come for the T, but it inevitably creeps back to the LGB. It's frustrating because normal people on the ground - they don't care, they don't have problems with trans people like this government wants them to." Hugo, nuclear engineer

Conclusion and recommendations

There must be a renewed urgency to tackle anti-LGBT+ discrimination and inequality in the workplace. We have set out our recommendations below for government, employers and trade unions.

Recommendations for government

Government should:

- Consult with unions on a strategy to make sure workplaces are safe for all LGBT+ people.
- Introduce legislation that would protect workers from harassment by customers and clients.
- Reform the gender recognition act, giving trans and non-binary people the right to self-determination.
- Maintain protections for trans and non-binary people in the equality act.
- Introduce a statutory requirement for large employers to report their LGBT+ pay gaps and employment rates – with regular monitoring and action plans detailing how employers will address these inequalities.
- Act to stamp out the insecure work that disproportionately hits LGBT+ workers, by banning zero hours contracts, raising the national minimum wage to £15 per hour as soon as possible, and acting on fire and rehire and bogus self-employment.

Recommendations for employers

Employers should work closely with trade unions towards greater LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace, by introducing and improving inclusive policies and practices.

- Regularly review workplace policies and how they are experienced on the ground by LGBT+ workers and customers/service users. Proactively gather feedback from diversity and inclusion networks and trade unions, as well as experts from LGBT+ charities and community organisations, to identify gaps.

- Take action to make sure that appropriate workplace policies translate into an inclusive culture. Provide training and information about LGBT+ issues and identities. Ensure that staff and managers can identify homophobia, biphobia and transphobia when it occurs, and work with unions to design safe reporting systems.
- Make sure that senior staff are equipped to set a clear culture of inclusivity from the top, and quickly and effectively stamp out bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Monitor and publish the LGBT+ pay gap in your organisation, and set an action plan for how to tackle gaps and support LGBT+ staff to progress through your organisation.
- Review recruitment processes and introduce steps to support LGBT+ staff to thrive, such as training for hiring managers, and providing information to candidates about the employer's commitment to inclusion.

More information is available in the [Wales TUC toolkit](#): 10 steps towards LGBTQ+ inclusive workplaces.

Recommendations for trade unions

Trade unions have a hugely important role in leading change in workplaces and across industries. Unions can also help to raise the expectations of LGBT+ workers.

Unions should:

- Actively get involved in workplace LGBT+ networks, to ensure that LGBT+ workers understand the union is there to help and support them, and build the confidence of reps and activists on LGBT+ issues. Unions should beware of leaving LGBT+ networks to be wholly management-led. Networks do not have protected rights in law like unions do, and often cannot speak independently of management. Plus, LGBT+ workers have reported inappropriate use of volunteers to develop diversity and inclusion policies through staff networks - unions should argue for protected time to work on these issues.
- Consult with LGBT+ members regularly to identify gaps in policy and practice – particularly around issues such as: bullying and harassment, recruitment, family leave policies, transitioning in the workplace and transition related leave, access

to facilities, uniforms and dress policies, gender options and titles on forms and workplace systems.

- Ensure that trade union reps have a strong knowledge of LGBT+ identities, issues and terminology, and of the law as it protects LGBT+ workers.
- Be visible on LGBT+ workers' issues - for example, by attending local and national Pride parades, explicitly communicating that trade unions stand ready to represent LGBT+ workers with issues and grievances communicating wins and successes, and using visual signals to demonstrate inclusion – consider the use of flags and pronoun badges/stickers, for example.
- Get involved in the [trade unions for trans rights network](#). The network will be a space for trade unions to work closely with LGBT+ charities and community organisations, to create and share resources and research, and co-ordinate campaigns.

Case studies

Below are a selection of case studies from the interviews. Transcripts have been edited for length, clarity and to protect anonymity. Names have been changed.

Case study 1: “I did feel like I was being paraded at points. As soon as head office found out about me, it was all - could I be in a magazine, could I do this campaign, and on and on”

Emmanuel is a delivery driver for a supermarket. He is in his 50s, is a trans man, and a trade union rep.

Before my current role, I was at another supermarket chain. I was the only female manager in the region. One day the area manager walked in and told me it was his job to sleep with all his reports. I said - well I'm definitely not going to sleep with you. This was all in the 90s. He made my life hell - he used to trap me, intimidate me in my office. The head of HR who I should have reported it to was having an affair with him.

It never even crossed my mind to join a union. It was never spoken about. I could have done with a union though, when I look back on it. The harassment I used to get. I finally left when I realised I was being paid £10k less than all my male peers.

So by the time I was transitioning - I'm not saying it wasn't hard. But I wasn't the first time in my career I'd had to deal with this sort of stuff.

When I joined my current company - someone said straight away - join the union. So I did on day two. It's a far better company ethos - you could just tell. For one thing, when I started there I just started seeing lots of LGBT colleagues. Maybe - 20 out of 500? No one batted an eyelid. This was still 2001 or something - I'd come from a place where absolutely no one was out - you just didn't talk about those things with your colleagues.

But my current company, they have policies in place about equality that were really clear. I never saw any bullying. Even when I speak to colleagues and friends they all said it's an easier place to work than others. I think it must have come down to a good store manager - I doubt every other branch would say the same thing. They do actually deal with individuals who harass and bully people. You are confident to raise issues because you know it will be dealt with. Managers are the key - you have to put pressure on the quality and consistency of managers. Without consistent managers, nothing works.

I've come out twice in my current role - once as a lesbian, about 18 years ago, once as trans eight years ago. Actually I was outed the first time. They did actually discipline that individual, even right back then.

When I realised I wanted to transition, I spoke with my fellow reps and friends in the union first, the support was tremendous. I knew I needed to go and speak with my manager, and my branch chair came and just sat with me. It was okay, overall.

The main problem for me is that I've been here so long, lots and lots of people knew me as a woman. I still get outed all the time. Especially since the pandemic, there's so much higher turnover of staff, and use of agencies. We get all these new people in all the time. Managers without even thinking will just say to new staff: "you've got E on your team, they're transgender."

I have started saying to people now I'm more confident - "what are you doing, you just outed me?" They laugh it off, like it's a joke, but I say - "no, this is serious". This is people who think they're great allies - they think "Just because I call E he / him, I'm fantastic".

But simple misgendering, they don't realise how harmful it is. I don't mind when people apologise - I know it's hard. But some you just feel they don't care.

The only other challenge I've had is that sometimes I did feel like I was being paraded. As soon as the head office found out about me, they were inviting me up there, could I be in a magazine, could I run this campaign, and on and on.

It is just about the politics of who's in charge - the politics filters down into workplaces. You know ten years ago it was disabled people who were really being attacked, and now it's us who are the ones in the headlines. I don't feel good about where things are going.

Case study 2: “I've been offered an opportunity, actually, to go for a higher paid role, but I'm sticking with my manager, Sarah”

Billie is 25, and working in their first job in a high street bank's call centre and a member of a union. They're agender and pansexual.

I graduated a few years ago - university was an incredibly positive experience for me. Not the institution itself - it couldn't care less, but I found my people, who knew so much more than me. I learned so much from them - first I thought I might be non-binary but it didn't quite fit with what I was feeling. I did some more research and realised agender is a better fit. I'm neurodiverse as well and understanding that lots of neurodiverse people think about gender identity differently was really helpful.

I graduated during the pandemic. I had a year and a bit not working and on universal credit. Mostly I spent those lockdowns looking after our eleven pets - that kept me busy enough. Job searching was hard. There was definitely a part of me that was worried about whether an employer would be inclusive or not. There's a lot of signposting - “look at us we're inclusive”. They like to make a big deal of it but you're not really sure. Saying that I wasn't really picky - I got to the point where I just needed a job. I would have accepted anything by the end.

I'm always very clear with my identity even at the point where I was applying for jobs. I always give my pronouns and they're all there in my email footer. Of all the interviews I did - I must have applied to 25 jobs that summer - not one person ever acknowledged it or used them. I always thought - you either don't care or you haven't looked at it. It's hard to make a fuss though - being agender was, is still, so new to me too, I was still becoming more confident.

The company I joined feels to me like a company that's trying really hard on diversity and inclusion but not really getting it right.

There aren't that many colleagues who are out in the call centre I work in. There are more gay and gender-nonconforming people, but they're not bringing their identity to work. That's their choice at the end of the day, but it can be so helpful to start conversations and help other employees. Not being able to be your true self at work is draining - it stops you forming bonds, it stops you forming friendships. It's the people who you work with who make it worth it. If you can't be your real self, you'll burnout, you'll leave.

My old manager, he was terrible to be honest. I explained to him about my agender status, and he said “that's fine I don't care if we've got gays in the group”. The line was “I don't care” but what he meant was “don't bring it to work”.

I have a T-shirt that I think is quite comical - it says "error 404: gender not found". He took me aside and told me to stop wearing it to work because it's too political.

I didn't really know anything about unions before I joined but someone told me to join. When that happened with my old manager, I didn't think there was much point talking to the union - I felt they wouldn't care or actually I felt like they wouldn't even know how to handle it. That was rather worrying - they don't really advertise very much awareness about gender identity issues. I didn't consider going to HR either.

I just dealt with that manager until I got a promotion. I moved into an anti-fraud team. My new boss is a woman called Sarah. She's in her 60s - she's worked at the company her whole career.

I was pretty nervous before our first 1-1. I didn't want to have to do the whole thing again. We sat down and she said tell me about yourself. I explained a bit about my gender identity and she said "that's interesting, what's that?". It felt like genuine curiosity. We talked for about an hour. I could see she was really thinking about it - at the end she went "so I would be a cis, hetero woman?" I said - "only if that's how you feel Sarah!"

It was a really important conversation for me because I felt like she was actively trying to understand. A while later there was an office pride party and she came with me.

I've been offered an opportunity actually to go for a higher paid role, but I'm sticking with Sarah. She gets my pronouns right every time, she corrects other people when they get it wrong. She even remembers most of the names of my eleven pets. She'd never even heard the term cis before our first one-to-one. The chances of me getting someone like that again - no way, I'd rather not risk it.

I feel pessimistic because the people in charge are not really changing. At the end of the day it's going to be the same white men and women at the top - people like myself bring ideas but there's no real channel for how to make a difference.

Case study 3: “We’ve gone backwards on this in the last few years. There’s no awareness, no confidence - even amongst good allies - to call this out.”

Cathy is a trans woman who works for a public sector arm's length body in a policy role. She's a union rep.

I joined my organisation in 2015. I knew I was bi but I never came out as bi in the workplace. As time went on I started to realise I was trans and I started my transition at the beginning of 2021.

Would they have fired me for being bi? Probably not. Maybe overlooked me for promotions or special projects, because it's just seen as all a bit weird by most old-fashioned civil servants.

But now they know I'm trans? The long and short of it is you cannot trust your employer to respect your human rights if you're trans. If the law changed and allowed them to remove me, they would.

I know point blank I will never get promoted because I'm trans. Not just because I'm trans, because I'm outspoken about it. That's a choice I've made.

I'd been thinking about coming out at work as trans for a while. They created a transitioning at work policy as a result of work the LGBT network did, and they'd also got a trans speaker in at the end of 2020. Those two things made it easier for me to go for it.

I joined the union just before I started transitioning. I actually didn't know we had one before that.

The team I was in at the time was not at all supportive. I purposefully applied to another role in another team which I thought would give me an easier space. I waited to change teams before I began transitioning at work - that was an extra delay, even after all the other delays, but felt like I had to do it.

I've definitely seen how I'm treated differently, now that I'm a woman and a trans woman. Before transitioning - I was very ill at that time. But actually I got very well supported - I could go and ask for the support, the time off - and they took me seriously. Because I was seen as a straight white man.

But when it came to transitioning - my employer did all the things they had to do, legally, to support my transition. But it never felt like they'd do more than what was required.

The thing is - beyond being an employer - my organisation plays a massive role in public debates on trans issues. I see the impact we have and the lines we take - and it's transphobic. So there's a limit on how inclusive it can feel to me as an employee.

I'm a rep now. It does feel like a trans-inclusive culture in the union, but I do think they can do a lot more.

The big problem for me is the false equivalence that comes from the media at the moment. Not enough people in my workplace understand that equality on the basis of gender identity is a legally protected right. There's this sense - well if Susan thinks I'm a man, then her right to call me a man is protected. This - there's 'two sides to the debate' thing.

We've gone backwards on this in the last few years. There's no awareness, no confidence - even amongst good allies - to call this out. Unions have such an important role to play in holding this line - we've all got to be saying it very loudly and clearly and leaving no room for confusion. I'm not sure the union movement is doing as much as it could.

The persistent misgendering I experience - I've never made a formal complaint. I've done a lot of grievances as a rep - I don't think it would be worth my time to start a process.

I actually feel quite optimistic about the future despite all of this. Public opinion is pro-trans - it's institutions, specifically the people who run them, who are anti. Unions have a really clear role: to push back hard and not prevaricate. It should be an absolute nightmare for employers to be bigoted - it's really as simple as that.

Case study 4: “Employers need to make space for us to do the day-to-day diversity work - you can’t replace that with some training videos.”

Ella has been a job coach for 5 years. She’s a union rep, and an equality officer. She’s bi.

Before the civil service, I worked in a call centre for M&S. They were so big on inclusion, it was just such a part of the culture. It's always felt like a timewarp since I joined the civil service. On day one, it felt like I'd literally gone back a couple of decades. I hear colleagues talking and I think, did you actually just say that?

Initially there was a proper space made for D&I [diversity and inclusion]. There was a group of us in a little LGBT network, seven of us, and we had time off our core duties to do presentations, training, etc. Now with all the budget cuts and the pressure - it’s all been cut. Now there’s nobody at all doing D&I.

I’ve always had difficulties with my mental health. On day one, I spoke to my manager about it - she literally said “there’s no such thing as reasonable adjustments in this department”. I told another colleague and they just said - “you’ll be needing this”, and handed me a union leaflet. The rubbish support I’ve had on LGBT issues is exactly the same as the rubbish support on mental health.

I’ve been shocked by the biphobia I’ve experienced. I’ve always been quite open - I haven’t exactly done a Pride parade for myself in the office, but I’ll be honest if people ask. But often people just make assumptions about bi people.

I was dating a woman for a long time, which I was very open about, and no one seemed to care. But we broke up, and I started dating a guy a while afterwards. I was outed by someone I didn’t really know - and suddenly it went like wildfire around the office. People who I’d literally barely ever spoken to were coming up and asking me such intrusive questions. One woman told me she’d never seen me as competition before. Another woman told me to go back to my own team.

I just couldn’t believe how I’d become hot gossip. People take you being bi as a weird sort of personal challenge, they seem to care so much more than when they think you’re just gay.

But the biphobia is nothing compared to what my trans and nonbinary colleagues experience. As an equalities rep, I’ve supported a lot of people. Someone who was referred to as “it” in the office by colleagues.

Realistically I'm quite pessimistic. I think compared to a few years ago things have got slowly worse - what’s happening in the media is making the outward hostility worse.

That outward hostility makes things worse for all queer people. Employers need to make space for us to do the day to day D&I work - you can't replace that with some training videos.

Case study 5: “The union plays such a big role - it gives you a home and a family in the workplace”

Andrew is a gay man in his 60s, looking back over a career working as a journalist. He's a union member.

I started in journalism in the 80s. I worked on a local paper for years and years and years. My boss was aware that I was gay but nothing was ever really brought up. Now I never really had an issue - I guess it's because most people in my office were women.

I'd see some people I worked with out on the scene in Leeds, and we'd chat, but would absolutely never acknowledge it in the newsroom. I don't think the younger generation now appreciate how different it was.

I did lose a job once when colleagues found out I was gay. It was the late 90s. I had a Gaydar profile. Someone saw it and shared it round the office. There was an evangelical Christian woman who took objection. I lost the freelance press role I had with them. Funnily no-one ever asked how the guy who had shared it came across it.

I worked for the [a local paper] for a long time. It was a very male environment. All the others would talk about their personal lives - the wife wants me to this, the in-laws that the kids this. I just kept quiet.

It was complicated because I was bringing up kids with a man at the time. Our eldest arrived in June 1996 through Arranged Parenting, and the twins arrived a couple of years after that. I remember once - nappies fell out of my bag on the newsroom floor. They all stopped and stared - someone just went “we thought you lived with Paul?”.

I did end up taking the twins into the newsroom but it was all very unorthodox at the time - there just were not a lot of gay men with kids at the time. I went back recently and attitudes have changed so much - there's a younger generation in. The union plays such a big role - not necessarily because of any formal grievance stuff, but because it gives you a home and a family in the workplace.

I don't know whether I feel optimistic or pessimistic. You look back, like we just have, on how much has changed. It doesn't matter your identity - everyone wants the same things. But we have the Murdoch influence, the right exploiting difference. It does worry me.

Case study 6: “There’s probably something in my contract or my terms about fertility leave - but honestly I haven’t read it and I wouldn’t go down that route.”

Heather lives in Northern Ireland and works in costume design. She’s a member of a trade union.

The thing about being freelance is that every time you start a new job - which is every 6-months – you’re just coming out all the time. I don’t really have a problem with it, but it can be daunting. We’re lucky in the film industry - as we work with creative people they tend to be more open-minded. I’ve never struggled too much. But there is just this ‘eurgh’ when people ask what my husband does, and I have to correct in to ‘my wife’. It’s just a constant thing in the background.

I did a degree and sort of just fell into this job. I absolutely love it - it’s really fun. Started as a trainee and have just worked my way up. You don’t get sick pay though - if I broke my arm on a job, I’d just have to leave. You’re very replaceable. My wife works in the same industry too - we do a lot of films together. Weirdly though we just met on Tinder.

We’ve been trying to plan fertility treatments for a while now. It’s complicated as what’s offered to us, or even legal, is different depending on where we are. The south of Ireland it’s different. We’re working in Prague right now, where it’s illegal.

We’ve been waiting three years for an NHS appointment - it’s coming up next month. We’ll be in Prague at the time. We don’t know how we’re going to tackle it - we absolutely can’t miss it.

There’s probably something in my contract or my terms about fertility leave - but honestly I haven’t read it and I wouldn’t go down that route. That’s just not how our industry works - I wouldn’t go in super hard with my union rights. Everything is just more informal than that. We’ll just wait till we get to Prague and bring it up nearer the time - we’ll probably just take unpaid leave.

I’m lucky - my supervisor is gay herself - so she’s been super understanding, especially about all of our fertility treatment appointments.

But I know life is much harder for friends in the industry - colleagues I suppose - who are gender nonconforming. There are lots of non-binary people around. I’m hyper aware of trying to get pronouns right all the time - I just try to really quickly correct if I make a mistake. But you do see a lot of the older people, especially men, failing even to try - “you need to be one or the other” etc.

I do think we all have a responsibility as queer people to make sure this changes - we do all have a role. My industry is terrible for that - its all good with your standard lesbians and gays but new gender identities is a stretch too far for people.

I joined the union when my friend made a WhatsApp group for a bunch of us. We were not unionised and getting screwed over. My friend, she'd been working in Canada where they're very organised and have much better rights. She organised a big Zoom meeting in lockdown at it went from there.

I wanted to get involved from a health and safety perspective - there are so many risks and often accidents on set. I never really thought about it from an LGBT perspective to be honest.

Looking forward, as a gay woman I feel more protected than our trans and nonbinary colleagues. They're just not getting the support. I don't feel optimistic for them.

The thing I'd change is more pride in the workplace events. It sounds silly but there's so much value to people being able to be open. So much of the difficulties comes from fear which comes from misunderstanding - structured places for people to talk more openly about gender would make a big difference.

Case study 7: “Being comfortably out in the workplace helped me to improve services for our patients”

Louis, is a 28 year old gay man, working as a clinical pharmacist in a hospital.

I quite like the team I work on - there's about 80 of us. There's a lot of LGBT+ representation - we joke we've got two of each letter in the team. We're quite lucky - none of us in the rainbow network have experienced real homophobia or transphobia.

My manager is an older straight cis guy, but he's just - I call it unconsciously inclusive. Nothing feels forced by him. I don't know how many other managers in the hospital would make me feel so at ease. If I was thinking about moving to a different role in the hospital, I'd definitely suss out whether the manager was bigoted or not. I'm really lucky now.

I guess when I chose this career I didn't really spend too long worrying about whether the spaces would be inclusive or not - I suppose I would never have chosen a career in the military or engineering or something.

A couple of times I've had experiences when colleagues - often older women - they're not sure how to act or what to say about our trans or non-binary colleagues. They've come and asked me - what does x want about this, or why does y do that. And I understand why they ask me but I'm like - I don't know! I'm not trans! I don't want to speak on their behalf. I guess it's a hard line to walk.

So much of the NHS is unnecessarily gendered - every form has M or F at the top of it, and we mix up gender and sex all the time.

I think because my team and my boss make it so comfortable to be out, and there's so much representation, I've found it easier to challenge some of those things. We were working with some consultants on a new ICT project, and I checked in with my manager about whether I could interject to add better questions in, about gender identities to the patient forms. He was very supportive, and now we have much better experience for patients because of that. So I can see how inclusion makes things better for the patients as well as for us. I don't think we would have got that change if the team wasn't so inclusive - it might have just gone under the radar.

Case study 8: “Managers wrongly believe that when someone asks to be referred to by a new name - that’s the end of the journey. They don’t understand it’s the start.”

Sandra works in retail. She doesn’t identify as LGBT+, but is supporting her own child to transition, and is an equalities rep, having been active in her union for over 20 years.

I’m in my 50s, I’ve seen a lot of change. I grew up in the swinging sixties when we were supposedly going through all sorts of revolutions - but looking back - the things we used to think and say then - you wouldn’t dream of now.

I go into lots of retail settings with the union, representing all sorts of different people. All the big retailers - they do have the policies in place now. It’s been recent but they do have them. The problem is its all lip service - you can see the managers don’t get it - there’s no human embodiment of these values.

I’m thinking specifically about trans and nonbinary staff. That’s partly because they’ve got the biggest uphill struggle in retail. But it’s also because I’ve been supporting my child, who has just turned 18. We’ve been supporting them with their transition for years and years now.

The thing that has really got me is that I don’t have the same rights another parent would, to support my child. If it was a different medical reason - it would have been - “of course you need to be there. I’m so sorry, do what you need to do.”

If you’d lived alongside us, supporting a teenager with gender dysphoria, you wouldn’t see it as a choice.

The challenge is getting the management to go beyond the policy and get to the feeling. I’ve done the management courses - all the inclusivity ones - there’s no allyship coming from there. But the academies with the union, the equalities forum - the education from there has been second to none.

It’s reinforced to me how anyone transitioning in a retail setting needs union representation. So many members have told me - they’ve never spoken to me with any politeness at all, until you came and sat next to me. The managers assume people are trans warriors - that if they’ve decided to transition then they’re totally fine, confident, ready, it’s easy. And for the staff - it’s hard to show that uncertainty, the turmoil, the everything that they’re feeling. So the managers’ view is - just get on with your work.

My role [as a rep] is to help the managers understand how my members are feeling, help them think about the right questions to ask. Help them understand this is incredibly long term, incredibly complicated.

Managers wrongly believe that when someone asks to be referred to by a new name - that's the end of the journey. They don't understand it's the start.

As a union, we have to find ways of getting this proper, real, deep understanding. Actually the members I work with - their colleagues - their peers - they tend to be okay. Because they know each other really well - they chat to each other more, there's friendships there. You do long, sometimes boring hours in retail - you really get to know your colleagues. So they take the time to understand the person as a whole, and where transitioning fits in. But the managers just cut to process and policy. It's not written down that managers should try to really understand the person and their journey - so none of them do it.

The last person I supported - M - I'd go out of my way to catch up with her on shift. Because I've been supporting my own child for so long, I know what to look for, I knew what she might be going through. So I realised one day, she was taking tablets, pills, off the internet. I know what the risks are there - I could support her properly with that.

It's all about creating open culture. The employers need to do away with their training courses, and have open real life conversations. There's not a set of right answers we're teaching people to learn by heart, we're encouraging them to be open, honest and curious.

You set and change culture in so many ways. I see customers eyeing up the staff on the tills. If they see someone presenting as LGBT+, as something they're not comfortable with, they try to switch queues. I'm looking for it because my teams tell me it happens. So when I see it - I go up to them, I'm very clear and polite - you go to the next available cashier. If the customer refuses I say - sorry you'll have to go to the back of the queue. That's how you set culture - small things, very consistent.

I don't really see the LGBT+ networks in retailers that much - or I don't see them having a big impact for the staff on the ground. It's the unions that make a difference - we have that space to properly get to know our members. It's only when you have those proper, whole, deep relationships, that you can properly support people doing something as complex as transitioning.

Overall I feel pessimistic - the policies are in place, so no more change has to come. The thing I'd change would definitely be the management training - let's have them properly listening to the lived experience of trans and nonbinary staff, not inclusion training from other cis managers.

Case study 9: “Sometimes we put too much emphasis on - we’re fighting for you. When you’re transitioning - sometimes the last thing you want is a fight. Sometimes you need to hear - we’re sitting alongside you. It’s not always a fight.”

Hugo is a trans man who works as a mechanical engineer in one of the UK’s nuclear power plants. He’s a union member.

I came out as trans in 2016. I’d say it’s still a work in progress. I had no idea I was trans for years and years. Someone reminded me since - that once, years back, I made a joke to them - that I was a gay man in a woman’s body. Even saying that - still didn’t occur to me I might be trans!

Overall you know it was a very good experience. When I started to think about transitioning, I wasn’t really getting on with my line manager. I went to someone at my union, and they pointed me to the right person in HR.

There was already an LGBT supporters network in the company - they were very helpful. But so were HR - they were very clear it was my journey and my transition - up to me how I came out and when. They gave me the option to tell people or they would tell people for me. We went with a bit of both in the end. I have extremely supportive colleagues - I’m acutely aware of how privileged I am compared to many trans people - both my background and in my workplace.

If there was any negativity - I didn’t hear about it. I suppose that was down to HR.

They’ve now got improved guidance for managers and employees and transitioning policies. It’s actually part of the wellbeing strategy - thinking about supporting transitioning. One thing the nuclear industry is good at is lessons learned - I feel like not only was I really supported but they have really taken my experience and applied it to our processes.

I suppose that could have been better. I could have asked the union for support whilst transitioning - it never occurred to me actually. I suppose it would actually have been really helpful just to have a rep there in the HR meetings. Not because they were confrontational - just because there’s someone else picking things up which you might forget. There’s so much going on, so much to take in. And you’re in a whirlwind at the time.

I guess I didn’t get paid sick leave for all the time I had to take off - I took half of it as holiday. That could have been different. Now that we’ve written the guidelines, we did suggest people work with a union rep - its actually there in the guidance.

There's not lots of out people in my workplace. The annual survey shows there are 0.5% who are trans or nonbinary. I have no idea who they are - I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. No one has to be out - sequins and all - if they don't want to be.

I'm in the LGBT network - one person has actually emailed me in confidence via that network, saying they're at the very early stages of transitioning, asking for support. That's a real positive - in a company our size, there's no way they would have found me without the network.

Overall it's a very male dominated place - but things are changing. There's a women's network, one for race, one for disability, one for carers. I think really the company understands that inclusion and diversity of thought is fundamentally good for business.

I honestly can't say I've really noticed issues. No one really misgenders me now - I am a bit hypervigilant on it. When I first started, people did misgender me a bit - but to be honest so I did I...

If I did leave, I do think I would worry about inclusive other organisations might be. It's hard to really know from the outside. Maybe I just wouldn't declare it - I mean, I have to have security clearance, which requires a GRC [gender recognition certificate]. So I would have to declare for security, but I'd hope or expect that wouldn't get shared wider.

The time and space you get for LGBT things is very dependent on your manager. My previous manager was a bit churlish about me doing it in work hours. But my current one is fine - I get two days of volunteering in my contract actually, and I use them for these things.

I think space for diversity and inclusion work should be explicitly protected in your job description. We could be much better about how explicitly and clearly we make time for involvement in the LGBT+ network. Or any of the other ones. It's not consistent or explicit at the moment and it puts a lot of people off. Union reps get protected paid time to do their work, and protection from discrimination for it. It should be the same for the equalities networks.

Sometimes we put too much emphasis on - we're fighting for you. When you're transitioning - sometimes the last thing you want is a fight. Sometimes you need to hear - we're sitting alongside you. It's not always a fight.

I feel pessimistic, looking forwards. We as trans people are being used as wedge issue. They're chipping away at our rights - and I say our as a community - they come for the T, but it inevitably creeps back to the LGB. It's frustrating because normal people on the

ground - they don't care, they don't have problems with trans people like this government wants them to.

Case study 10: “I have a rainbow lanyard - mostly to show allyship to parents and kids. But I feel terrible and really self-conscious, that when I’ve done interviews, I’ve taken it off.”

Layla is a primary school deputy headteacher. She’s a member of her union and recently came out as a lesbian.

I’ve been here for nine years now. I just turned 40. I only came out to myself when I was 38 - it took me totally by surprise. I got into a relationship with another member of staff at my school.

Even before I was out to anyone - my headteacher said to me about my partner “no one would ever say it, but if you look like a lesbian, you’re not going to get a job in a primary school”. People don’t guess that I’m gay, so I hear the homophobia. I just can’t believe it - I’m like - you’re just telling me how happy you are to break the law.

Anytime when our relationship started, we knew the right thing to do was to let our senior leadership know. My partner was out as non-binary in school, but not for their sexuality.

It was shocking because as soon as we’d gone to senior leadership - it got out and the whole staff room knew. We were the one topic of hot gossip- I’ve been asked how we have sex, by colleagues, in the staff room. I was shocked - it was all so new to me. But my partner’s had it for years.

I couldn’t believe someone on SLT [the senior leadership team] had just shared this around. When we complained to them - they literally said - “it’s just workplace banter”. I couldn’t believe it - literally couldn’t believe it. We’d just been outed - we weren’t even out to our families.

My partner made a formal complaint and got a lot of support from the union. They were brilliant, they really were - they listened to all the details of the case, went away and did research, came back with really clear and informed guidance on what’s not ok for my partner, and gave them really useful advice for the formal meetings.

I don’t think they were a specific LGBT rep - I think it’s just who my partner was allocated. We never even thought there might be a specific service or team or whatever for nonbinary people.

Anyway it got kind of resolved - but my head has been completely off with me ever since. My partner was on a temp contract so has left, but I’m still here. I went for an internal promotion alongside three other staff - I was the most experienced by far, but I didn’t get it, apparently because of lack of experience.

It's horrible to be really honest with you. I still feel uncomfortable and unsafe in school. I'm sitting in my car on my lunch break to have this conversation with you. It's been two years since we were outed, and I still get it - the looks, the sniggers, the comments. It's unending. I'm the PHSE co-ordinator for the school, I'm meant to lead pride month etc. Now that just seems totally impossible. The pointed comments - I don't know how I'd manage.

I am looking for other jobs, and there's no way I'd be open about my sexuality in interviews. Not after I've heard what I've heard here.

Coming out has changed my view of my career massively. I have a rainbow lanyard - mostly to show allyship to parents and kids. But I feel terrible and really self-conscious, that when I've done interviews, I've taken it off.

I feel terrible about doing that because I know what I've needed most is better allies - allies to shut down gossip, to make clear what's not ok, to challenge people on their language and assumptions and the rest of it.

I do feel optimistic overall though - having said all of that - my daughter is 14, and her age group - they're so much more aware, sophisticated, than any of my generation. When they're adults, the world will be a better place. For now my focus is on the kids I teach - I just get my energy from them, and the inclusivity and kindness that diverse groups of kids have naturally. It's a world away from my colleagues, unfortunately.

Support and resources

Trade unions

To find out more about trade unions and which is the best for you go to www.tuc.org.uk/join-a-union

Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas)

Acas gives employees and employers free, impartial advice on workplace rights, rules, and best practice: www.acas.org.uk

CIPD

The professional body for HR and people development: www.cipd.org

National Bullying Helpline

The National Bullying Helpline has over 20 years' experience helping employees and businesses with bullying: <https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>

Stop Hate UK

Stop Hate UK provides independent, confidential and accessible reporting and support for victims, witnesses and third parties: <http://www.stophateuk.org/>

Stonewall

The Stonewall Diversity Champions programme supports employers to create more LGBTQ+ inclusive workplaces: www.stonewall.org.uk

Switchboard

Switchboard is an LGBT+ helpline. 0300 330 0630. Online chat is also available through their homepage: <https://switchboard.lgbt/>

Mindline Trans+

MindLine Trans+ - 0300 330 5468 - is a confidential emotional, mental health support helpline for people who identify as transgender, agender, gender fluid and non-binary: <https://bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-counselling/mindline-transplus/>

Mindout

Mindout is a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Queer Mental Health Service - 01273234839 (10am-10pm weekdays, 2pm-10pm weekends) - Email: info@mindout.org.uk - or directly through their Online Support service, dates and times on the website: www.mindout.org.uk

Galop

Galop offers a helpline for for LGBT+ people experiencing abuse or violence, such as hate crime, domestic abuse, sexual violence, so-called "conversion therapy" or any other kind of abuse. 0800 999 5428. Chat support is available on their website: <https://galop.org.uk/get-help/helplines/>