

Pride in Sport

How can we engage LGBT students into sport?

For many students, sport is an important part of college and university life. Yet, many lesbian, gay, bi and trans students' feel excluded or uncomfortable participating in sport because of factors including the culture, structure, and physical environment in which sport takes place.

Introduction

We know that sport is a huge part of university and college life for many students and also that it is one of the primary ways that students engage with their students' unions. We found from our work representing LGBT students across the UK, that many LGBT students have found sports teams to be a welcoming and supportive environment, enriching their time whilst in education. However, we have also heard that students feeling uncomfortable engaging in sport. No student should feel excluded from participating in any activity open to their peers, particularly not something as integral to university and college life as sport.

It's an incredible part of my job being able to visit students' unions and see campaigns around LGBT representation and sport being put at the heart of a students' unions campaign priority and it's incredible that as a union you are working on tackling the pernicious attitudes of LGBTphobia, not only in sport, but society as a whole.

Although many LGBT students who do not participate in sport are simply not interested or do not have the time, our research shows that there are many reasons that LGBT students don't engage, in 2011 the NUS LGBT campaign commissioned [research](#) into this topic and found that, 46% of LGBT students don't

participate in sport and find the culture around sport alienating and unwelcoming. And 41% had a negative experience at school which has meant that they don't want to get involved at college or University.

The barriers to participation

The barriers to LGBT students' participation in sport can be cultural, structural, or physical. These are discussed in our 'Out in Sport' report, and we've also further explored [barriers to participation in Student Opportunities](#).

Cultural barriers are perhaps most significant, with the main reasons not to participate in sport being that students find the culture around sport alienating or intimidating, or that they have had a negative experience at school. It is important to note that LGBT students' perceptions of the culture around student sport can pose a barrier to their participation, regardless of whether their perception is accurate.

Structural issues, such as the reliance on single-gender sports teams and gender-specific kit and clothing, also cause LGBT students to be hesitant to participate in sport.

This barrier is even more significant for trans students who lack sufficient information about whether they are eligible to participate and/or

compete on a single-gender team. Physical conditions such as the way changing rooms and other facilities are laid out are also very important. This is not only because LGBT students may be concerned for their privacy but also because the traditional setup of these facilities is seen as conducive to homophobic behaviour or comments.

These barriers are preventing LGBT students from fully enjoying and benefitting from participation in sport, and need to be eliminated. Crucially, the majority of LGBT students' sporting activity is organised by their students' unions or educational institutions. That means that students' unions and providers of further and higher education can take action that has a real effect on the way that LGBT students experience sport.

Universities and colleges will always be one of the places where people try a sport for the first time. We must foster an environment where people from all walks of life feel comfortable signing up to sports teams during welcome week and beyond. We must also work closely with partners in schools, government, communities, and business to build clear and supported routes that encourage participation in sport through educational institutions. Let's make sure the doors of our sports halls are open to more than just the usual suspects.

I really hope that from today, more LGBT students will see that their union creates opportunities for them to participate in sport. LGBT students should be able to fully enjoy and benefit from participation in sport.

Rob Young

LGBT Officer (Open Place), NUS

Campaign ideas

Rainbow laces

LGBTphobia remains a big problem in sport. Seven in ten fans have heard homophobic abuse on the football terraces and 60% of gay, bi and men who sleep with men, 40% of lesbian, bi and women who sleep with women expect to experience discrimination if they were to take part in a team sport.

Rainbow Laces is a campaign to start tackling these issues. Over the last two years [Stonewall](#) have sent a pair of Rainbow Laces to every professional footballer in the country and encouraged them to lace up and tackle the problem once and for all. In 2014, players from over 70 clubs including Arsenal and Manchester City laced up and joined a growing movement for change. A massive 30% of the UK population saw the campaign and over 100,000 pairs of laces were distributed. Crucially, attitudes began to change too.

This campaign can be used during fixture matches on a Wednesday, or you can use them during your varsity matches, to highlight the campaign and draw attention to the inequalities within sport for the LGBT community.

For example, at Kent, for the Canterbury Varsity, which over 8,000 people attended, they ran an LGBT spotlight campaign. All participants wore the laces, and engaged in a training session and social media campaign around access to sport for members of the LGBT community. This is something that we are growing for the coming year, and are in conversations with Stonewall about.

To order your laces, you can join players, fans and individuals committed to making sure sport is welcoming of everyone [by ordering your Rainbow Laces](#).

Signed charters

Students' unions across the UK are supporting sports charters. These are a great opportunity to get sports teams to sign a charter that is

linked to a contract to read and adhere to. The signed charters can be displayed in your students' union and can be a method to hold sports to account.



Of course, prevention is a much better tool than to reprimand, so it is suggested that sports team training is given around what inclusive sports looks like. Additionally, we suggest that a contract is made between sports teams and the students' union to confirm the mutual expectations. Once both events have been completed, get the sports teams' captains to sign a board and place it in a prominent location in your union.

The campaign at York St John brought sports teams in for training on inclusivity, consent, and general training on how to run an affective sports team.

A template of the contract from Bangor Union can be found in the Case Study section of this resource.

Intramural leagues (The Justin Cup)

Plymouth Students' Union held an event to encourage LGBT participation in sport, and to break down the barriers of gendered sport. The intramural league was named '[The Justin Campaign](#)', in memory of Justin Fashanu. All teams were non-gendered and they played teams against each other in a series of sports games and different sports.

The teams played football, hockey, non-touch rugby, netball and basketball the teams were open to all sports players and societies with particular attention being paid to the LGBT+ society to actively engage in the fixtures and play against all other sports teams. This demonstrated that sports teams are trying to break down the barriers for LGBT participation and opened up sports to all students who may be interested in playing a sport.



Each team played against each other at each sport and at the end of all fixtures played the team with the biggest amount of wins would win the Justin Cup.

The cup can be placed in the students' union, and each year have the winning teams name above it. This again highlighting the campaign and also, educating the students on barriers to participation and culture around sport.

Case study: University of Kent Students' Union

At Kent we take pride on being an inclusive institution that takes liberation seriously and not as a token gesture. We believe in the education of students and creating a culture in which all feel welcome in. Some of the things we have developed at Kent are:

Kent

Inclusion stripe is something that all student groups can work towards. The stripe is awarded to groups who are meeting and evidencing the diverse needs of students and catering for all. We look to groups who make special efforts to include students that don't traditionally engage.

Inclusion week. For the first time this year we ran an inclusion in sport week, running a range of activities and training courses. An external body led inclusion training for the lead volunteers of all of our sports clubs.

Case study: Bangor University Students' Union

Sport is a huge part of Bangor University life and we proactively encourage students to take part in physical activity and exercise at a level to suit them: whether it's participating in our AU clubs or being involved in our campus sport program. At the heart of Bangor Sport is the Athletic Union, with over 2500 members, we feel it's important that we communicate to the student body the importance of appreciating diversity of all minorities within sport. Sport provides extra-curricular activity as a break from studies; not only having health and fitness benefits but also providing a great opportunity to meet and make friends.

Bangor Students' Union believes that sport should be accessible to everyone, regardless of sexuality or gender.

The campaign aims to help break barriers faced

by LGBT students in engaging or participating in sport. Whether the problem is the changing facilities provided or simply a perception that an LGBT student may have of a particular sports club, through raising awareness and understanding – as well as clearly promoting our Zero Tolerance to Harassment Policy – 'Out In Sport' hopes to nurture a sporting environment that's welcoming to all.

Place your Pledge

"I pledge that:

I will have an active role in tackling homophobia and transphobia in sport.

I will accept and celebrate LGBTQ+ within the sporting and wider community.

I will support any student or team mate who is out in sport and create a sporting environment which is welcoming to all.

I will actively help break down some of the barriers that LGBTQ+ students face when it comes to participating in sport, while educating others on the importance of the campaign."

For further information about this campaign, please email [Rob Young](mailto:Rob.Young).

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