

**The
LGBTQ+
Teachers
Network
(Scotland)**



**2023
Pride Month Report**

**'The lived experience of LGBTQ+
teachers in Scotland'**

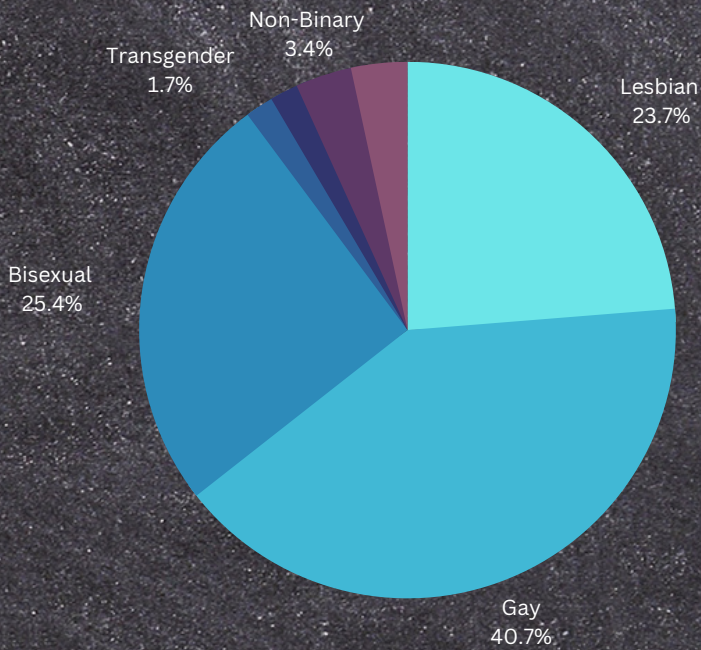
Welcome to the first LGBTQ+ Teachers Network (Scotland) Pride month report. It's an incredibly challenging time for educators and being an LGBTQ+ teacher can be difficult. But it can also be uniquely rewarding. LGBTQ+ teachers are crucial positive representations for students of every sexuality and gender identity. Being an incredible teacher is about more than communicating curriculum. It's about connecting with students and giving them the tools—including confidence and compassion—they need to succeed. LGBTQ+ educators must be welcomed, supported, and appreciated in every school and setting.

This report makes interesting reading. We were the first country in the world to embed LGBTQ+ inclusive education into our curriculum but we seem to be far from the beacon of hope we once thought we were. The data and comments in this report come from 108 LGBTQ+ Educators from different educational sectors and areas across Scotland.

In their work with policies, curricula, and hiring, school leaders can have a huge impact on LGBTQ+ student experience by promoting a safe, welcoming, and fair environment for LGBTQ+ educators in their schools, enabling these LGBTQ+ educators to be the critical and positive representations LGBTQ+ students need, in addition to being fantastic educators too!

We hope that you take this report as a 'moment' in our profession and look at the continued good work we are all doing, how we can continue to take steps to ensure the right policies, resources, and practices are in place to promote a more positive and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ educators and LGBTQ+ students alike.

John Naples-Campbell
LGBTQ+ Teachers Network (Scotland)

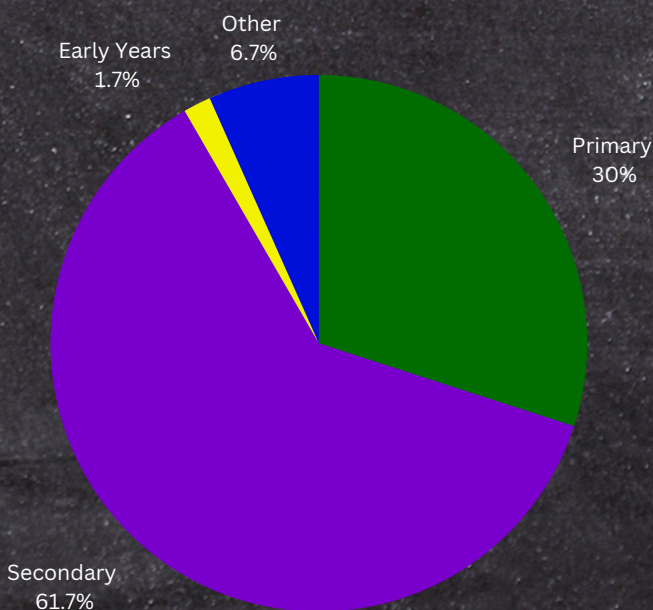
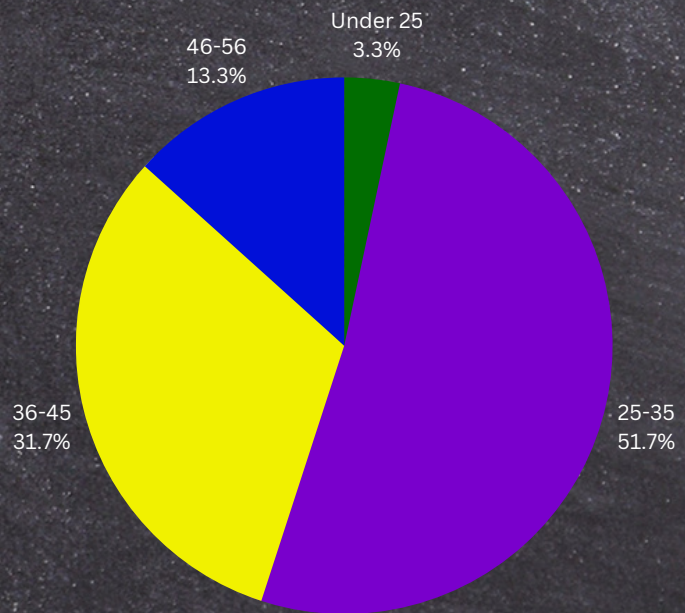


How do you identify?

Most people identified as 'Gay' although we have representatives across all educational sectors who belong to the LGBTQ+ community

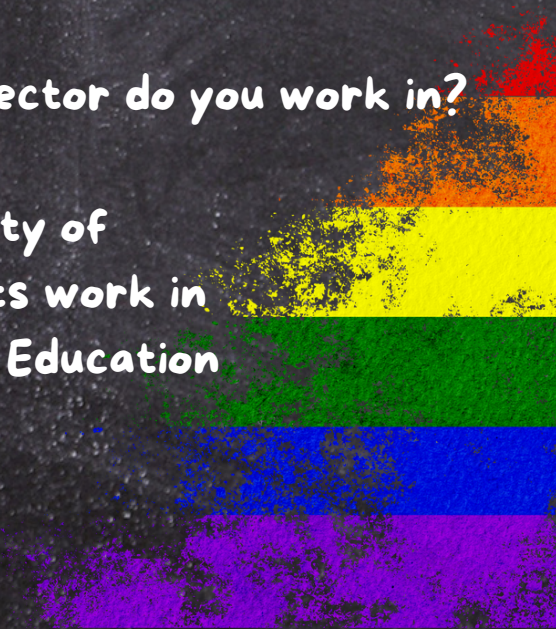
What age are you?

The majority of participants who took part are educators who would have been at secondary school post Section 28.



What sector do you work in?

The majority of participants work in Secondary Education



'OUT' at work

The idea that teachers can be life changing influences is nothing new. But the idea that (out) lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) teachers can be life-saving is. Still, some LGBTQ+ teachers choose not to share their gender or sexuality with their students, peers, or senior leaders. Not to overstate it, but having an out LGBTQ+ teacher (or 10!) can literally alter the trajectory of a student's life for the better. And the benefits of having an out teacher don't just exist for LGBTQ+ kids — kids who aren't LGBTQ+ can benefit, too.

- It can help students feel seen and safe
- It can help create a larger sense of community
- It can give all students access to another ~slice of life~
- It can offer tangible proof that a happy LGBTQ+ life is possible
- It may help students realise they want to be teachers themselves
- It can give students a person to direct their questions to

A classroom without representation is a classroom that fails in several ways. First, it doesn't accurately represent the world as it actually is. Second, it can lead kids who are "different" or "other" from what they see represented in their surroundings to feel like outsiders, they say. The experience of being an outsider can make someone feel like they're deviant, defective, deficient, or delusional. Whether you come out is a personal decision, one that several factors can influence, including:

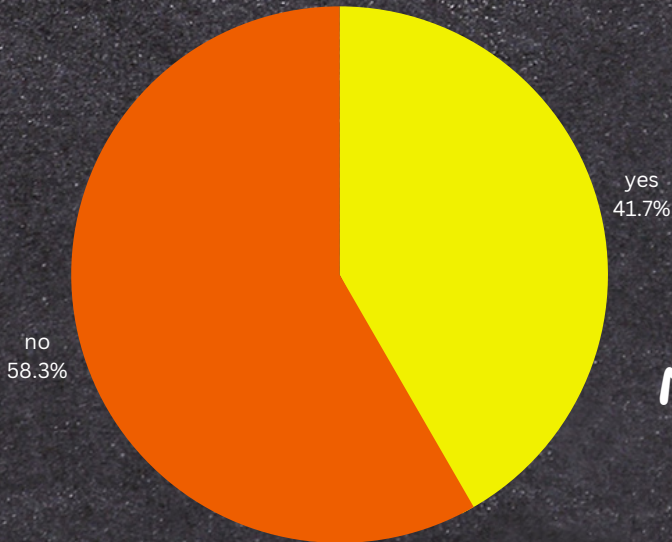
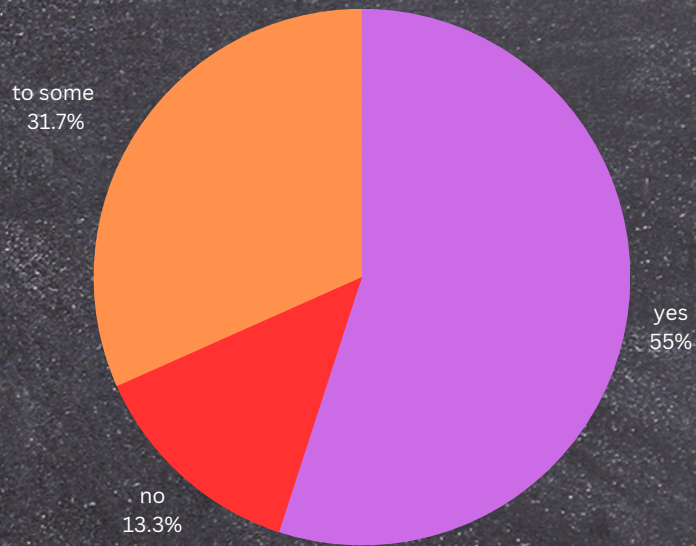
- how comfortable you are with your sexual orientation or gender identity
- how comfortable you are with different labels used to describe your identity
- your relationship status and security
- job and financial security

There are potential benefits to consider, too.

- You get to be yourself. People who are authentic in the workplace are better workers and tend to do more work.
- You won't have to live a "dual" life
- It may help your mental health
- It may give you opportunities to be a mentor to students who need one
- It may extend the "lifespan" of your career. Dr C Lee says that LGBTQ+ people make great leaders

Are you 'OUT' to staff at school?

Some staff found that they felt comfortable coming out 'to some' staff but not all.



Are you 'OUT' to students at school?

Majority of participants aren't 'out' to students in their school community.



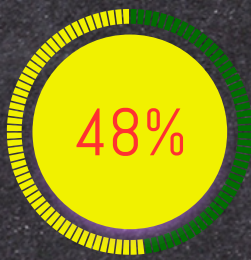
Support in Schools

Posters on walls in schools don't cut it – it's how students, teachers and school leaders deal with specific incidents that really makes a difference. The climate of a school has a direct impact on both how well students learn, staff work and how well they interact with their peers. There are many things that schools and individual students and staff can do to improve how safe and included LGBTQ+ students and staff feel everyday.

Do you think your SLT are supportive of LGBTQ+ issues within your school?



said YES!



of LGBTQ+ teachers thought their colleagues were supportive of LGBTQ+ issues within their school

Do you think pupils are supportive of LGBTQ+ issues within your school?



said



Being an LGBTQ+ ally means supporting and advocating for the rights and equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals. This can include speaking out against discrimination and hate, educating oneself about LGBTQ+ issues, using inclusive language, and actively supporting LGBTQ+ individuals and organisations. It's important to remember that being an ally is an ongoing process, and it requires a commitment to listening, learning, and taking action to create a more inclusive and accepting world for all.

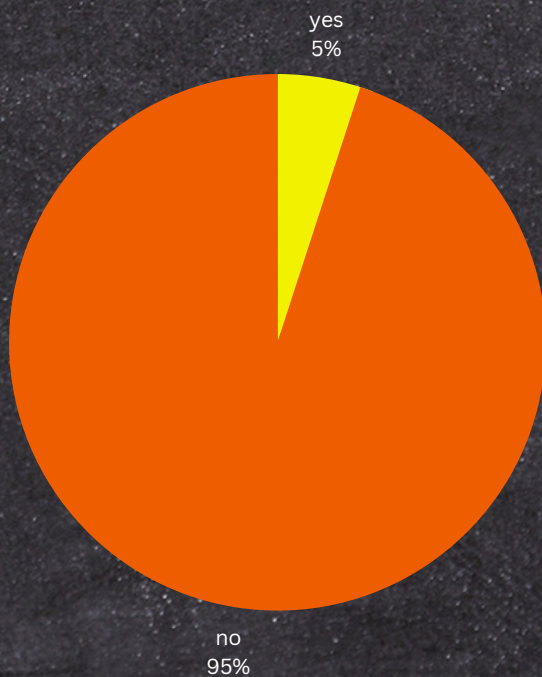
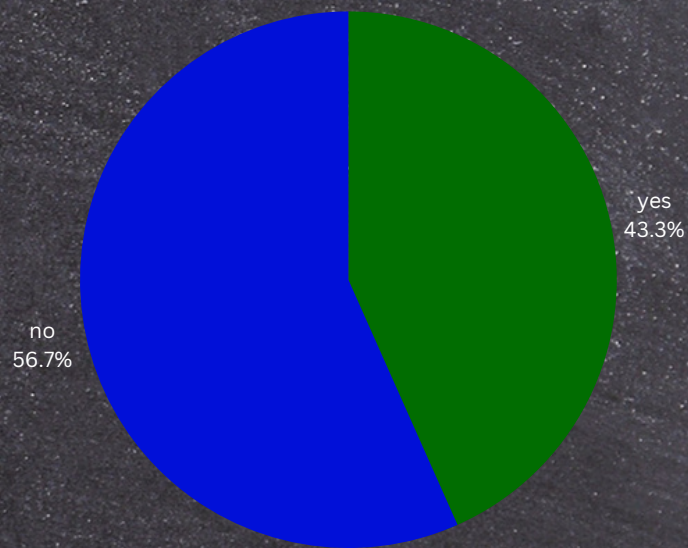
Safety in Schools

THE UK has tumbled down a list of "safe" LGBTQ+ countries with hate crimes reaching "dramatic numbers". Rainbow Europe now ranks the UK 17th out of 49 countries in the continent for achieved LGBT rights. Nine years ago, it was ranked 1st.

Have you faced verbal 'homophobia' or 'transphobia' in your school.

(for clarity 'homophobia' was used a general term to cover the LGBQ+ part of the community)

Majority said 'NO' however those that said 'YES' - 52% of them either reported it to their Senior Leadership Team or to Police Scotland.



Have you faced physical attacks or threats because of your sexuality or perceived sexuality?

Majority of participants said 'NO' but those that said 'YES' only 8% reported it.



Curriculum and Development in Schools

Scotland has made significant strides in promoting LGBT education in schools. In 2018, the Scottish Government released new guidelines for schools on how to create inclusive learning environments for LGBT students. These guidelines include a focus on the use of inclusive language, the promotion of LGBT history and culture, and the provision of support for LGBT students, a first for any country. Additionally, the Scottish Government has committed to providing training for teachers on LGBT issues. While there is still progress to be made, Scotland's efforts to promote LGBT education are a step in the right direction towards creating a more inclusive society.



of participants felt their school did not have a truly inclusive curriculum. More work needs done.

With growing harrassment towards the LGBTQ community we asked staff if they felt Senior Leaders in schools were given current and relevant training to support not only LGBTQ+ students but LGBTQ+ staff and allies.



"What challenges do you experience in school that SLT could help mitigate?"

"Diversity needs to be prioritized"

"School need to recognise that transphobia isn't restricted to those who identify as trans. Respectful, inclusive behaviour has to be taught and reinforced - it doesn't just happen by sticking some posters up."

"The subtle prejudice we face every day."

"the triggering impact of seemingly low-level abuse on people who have been attacked for protected characteristics in the past."

"That lack of education and open discussion of different sexualities and gender identities (I was at secondary school JUST when Section 28 was revoked but it might as well not have been) can be really harmful. I didn't know how I identified until I was about 30 because I didn't feel like a "normal gay" and I was too ashamed of how I did feel to go looking for other explanations of who I was. I thought no one else had ever felt how I felt. I know kids now see all this stuff on social media but I don't think it's the same as real education, hearing from actual people who have walked that path in real life."

"Please stop assuming that people 'look' queer. Please stop assuming everyone is straight. As a feminine queer woman I have to re-come out in every school I work in. This is tiresome and is based purely on the heteronormative assumption that everyone is straight and gay people 'look gay'. Also - I noticed your homophobia/transphobia question did not mention biphobia - please read the Bi Report (Stonewall, 2020) for a deeper dive into the specific difficulties faced by bi people. I am proud of my bisexuality/queerness/fluidity but it prevents me from being 'out' to pupils as bisexuality is particularly sexualised and seen as 'inappropriate' for children."

"How it feels to be scared to be who you are and why it's so important that we show our pupils that we don't tolerate hate. That we need to challenge all negative language and more people need to help move equality forward, it can't just be one person doing ALL the work"



"What challenges do you experience in school that SLT could help mitigate?"

"That everyone has a right to an education and a curriculum that is not perceived to be inclusive by pupils can be intensely damaging later in life."

"We are no longer in Section 28 but it certainly feels like it. Views from some members of the community are not only scary but slanderous."

"It feels very much like we're going backwards and it's scary. I would like to be open and out but I don't feel I will be supported and so i'm hiding who I am which means I'm not always doing my best work."

"I've been very open about my sexuality and it was never an issue till recently where I have begun to hear comments from staff. It's disheartening."

"One of the challenges is the ever-changing people - therefore any learning has little legacy."

"That how you talk behind closed doors as an impact on a school ethos and culture. Leading with your values has to permeate everything or it means nothing. I chose not to come out because I started working in my school as a single person so there was no real need to share this. This then however subjected me to hearing homophobic comment/slurs as staff didn't worry about hiding this from me as they believed me to be straight. Even in this capacity, challenging it meant nothing when the HT did not in any way promote these values (or the LA - I got "into trouble" from the director of education personally for asking the local councillor for funding to do out LGBTQ+ charter, I was also asked keep my sexuality secret if moving into a HT post)."

"What challenges do you experience in school that SLT could help mitigate?"

"Casual homophobia in the staff room - views from parents that need challenged. It's not a great time to be LGBT"

"Not assume that because it is 2023 that everything is fine"

"To not be so judgemental and to be aware that not everyone has the same beliefs and "family". Also, I have a great number of LGBTQ+ pupils seek refuge in my classroom during break and lunch due to the prejudices they face in the school community - something should be done about this"

"Having not come out until later in life, I think they could take the knowledge that being visibly open to lgbtq+ discussions would help young people and staff be themselves and feel included and accepted for who they are and a younger age"

"Although not blind to prejudice I am pleased that Scotland, and its education system, has come as far as it has."

"That those who are authentic and open actually do better work and become better role models. That SMT need to support their LGBTQ+ staff better in order for them to feel more understood"

"I have been lucky enough to be in a really supportive school with both staff and pupils. Everyone has accepted me for me and have supported my transition from being known as 'mx' to 'mr'."

"I am a member of SLT- it's been the lack of support from the local authority central team that was lacking. I feel there was discrimination from a community when I was offered a HT position. The LA knew and actively tried to talk me out of accepting it. I have never ever experienced discrimination from pupils or staff in a school community."



What could your school learn from your journey and the challenges you have had to overcome?

"No one chooses to be LGBT+, we are just living our lives and want to get on with our jobs without harassment"

"Jokes that some staff think are funny but are offensive, and this is why people do not share about their lives."

"I'm not out at school and having a husband children don't really question my sexuality. SLT look visibly uncomfortable in conversations when homophobic language is reported but will respond when homophobic parents complain if their son is called 'gay' when they don't identify as such. Educating themselves on lgbt and feminist issues would have a huge impact on the culture of the school. Thankfully rhsp opens up a lot of conversations in class but it doesn't do enough."

"I now work in HE, but have worked in state and private sectors. What I have found is that SLT are ill equipped to deal with homophobic problems when they arise from pupils. Moreover, incapable of dealing with family or community homophobia directed towards staff."

"Parental anxieties about whether it is appropriate for LGBTQ+ education in Primary - "are they not too young". Parents need more education as to what LGBTQ+ education actually is."

"Having to listen to inappropriate comments- challenging them is exhausting"

"I have had negative comments from parents that SLT could have done more to combat or challenge. I have also had lots of positive comments from parents regarding my lgbtq identity"

"I am SLT in a school. It can't always be up to SLT to mitigate all issues. We need support from central teams. It needs to be a collective response. You can't change perceptions and engrained attitudes by running to SLT and what happens when SLT face the same challenge who supports them."



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If your school could do one thing better to be more inclusive for LGBTQ+ people what would it be?

"Have all staff trained on LGBT inclusion"

"Embed LGBT scenarios/ texts/ history as part of the day to day curriculum so that it is not seen as different or an add on"

"Being mindful of cis heteronormativity and working to avoid this"

"Embrace pride - I asked if I could lead some activities (create a working group with some senior pupils) and was told it has to come from the children otherwise it looks like we are indoctrinating them"

"Incorporate it more in the curriculum from an earlier stage"

"Better inclusive education and training for all staff to support not only LGBT pupils but teachers and staff too"

"Celebrate pride month"

"To actually teach it at every primary class! Sounds obvious but some schools and teachers won't go near an lgbt lesson"

"Total zero tolerance of any kind of queerphobia - we have zero tolerance of racism; why isn't this courtesy extended to us?"

"Challenge homophobic behaviour and language and actually put consequences in place. Also slt are scared to openly discuss the issue for fear of upsetting certain pupils or parents. In deputes words to another parent... we don't celebrate when children voice their choices/feelings around sexuality/gender, we just give them the space to develop themselves. In other words, we stay quiet and ignore it."



If your school could do one thing better to be more inclusive for LGBTQ+ people what would it be?

"Not assume that because our lgbt+ pupils aren't visible (we are a medium sized school in a small town with a lot of deprivation- lots of lgbt+ folk here keep their heads down) that they don't exist"

"TIE training and curricular mapping."

"More visibility of LGBTQ+ acceptance and celebration."

"Celebrate Pride and lead by example by calling out hatred."

"Avoid tokenistic gestures - broaden conception of what it is to be inclusive. So much dialogue on - inclusive schooling, but often only conceived as ASN inclusion."

"We are going for the Silver Award with LGBT Youth"

"Not bow down to trivial complaints about absolutely appropriate educational issues by parents."

"Accept people as people, try to understand the challenges that come with being part of the LGBTQ+ community and above all have compassion for all."



What your experience of being an LGBTQ+ teacher in Scottish education?

"I have had a very positive experience. Staff and SLT have been massively supportive and when I set up pride in my (highland) school they went above and beyond to support. Pupils have always been respectful to me but there is still some way to go for all pupils to respect each other"

"Positive - so far!"

"I moved from Edinburgh to a rural community and regret it. Attitudes are so backwards that I feel unsafe to be my authentic self in the workplace."

"I'm a queer person in Scotland but i'm not a queer educator, I wish I could be."

"Some local authorities are stuck in the Stone Age. The experience I had would not have been the same if I had been in a city in Scotland."

"I would say overwhelmingly positive. I have found the students are keen to find out about my husband and don't bat an eyelid when I first say to a class "my husband". It is so refreshing. Long may it continue."

"I am working hard to make LGBTQ+ people more comfortable and secure in my school but would not say I feel out and proud myself."

"My experience has overall been positive, but I taught in Further Education for 20 years before switching to schools, largely because I left school in 1993 and swore I'd never set foot in one again. My current school is largely supportive but ineffective in that support. Previous school was a large RC secondary and the culture was very much one of "don't ask, don't tell" - I was a flex route probationer at that point and it was extremely uncomfortable."



What your experience of being an LGBTQ+ teacher in Scottish education?

"I am a proud queer primary teacher. But I would argue that the primary school context is the most homophobic/biphobic/transphobic (HBT) of all educational establishments due to narratives of childhood innocence and LGBTQ+ lives as 'sexual'. I find working in this environment draining and cannot have a normal conversation in the staffroom without a) people clamming up or b) people making awkward comments such as 'oh my cousin is gay'. The Scottish Government and local authorities NEED to take action on HBT behaviours amongst school staff."

"I've seen huge changes since I started in 1992. I wasn't out at first because I thought I could lose my job. I was a pregnant lesbian in a catholic school when they were repealing section 2a in 1999. Change didn't really start happening till 2010 after the Equality Act. I know that catholic schools still have a problem fully supporting LGBT education. I have experience of this and know from friend a in that sector. I moved to non-denominational sector in 2008."

"I feel that around 3/4 years ago there was an appetite from inclusion, encompassing of LGBT issues. However, more recently I believe there is a societal eye-roll at play in that most people believe inclusion has been achieved and they are over it / sick of hearing about it. This is disconcerting for the continued furtherance of LGBTQ+ inclusion. It is also concerning re: the emaciated uptake in the UNCRC in our context."

"My experience has been extremely positive. I am away to start my 4th year of teaching and have transitioned from miss to mx to mr. Every stage of my journey has been supported and I couldn't be more grateful for my colleagues and students."

"I am cisgender and gay and I have a senior role in Scottish education and know an enormous number of fellow LGB HTs, DHTs, heads of service, HMIs, etc. To be fair, I would imagine that there are greater challenges for transgender colleagues."

"On the whole, positive"

"I feel scared, ashamed and frightened to be me."

What your experience of being an LGBTQ+ teacher in Scottish education?

"I have not had any negative experiences with staff in my department but with the wider somewhat unwelcoming environment of the school in terms of LGBTQ+ issues I don't feel comfortable being out to pupils for fear of lack of support from SLT."

"Over the past few year's incredibly negative and concerning. The gender critical movement has infiltrated into our workplace to the point where it feels unsafe to have a truly inclusive curriculum or challenge language. It some parts it feels like section 28 all over again and that scares me!"

"So far, having only taught in one school for a prolonged time, it has been fine. My main question is how appropriate it is to be fully open with pupils. My faculty head is also gay but has advised against being too open in case any pupils then start to use this against me, but I feel like that's the opposite approach that we should take. I understand he is looking out for me, but it also makes me wary about generally what I can and cannot say."

"Exceedingly supported by pupils - I don't go about sharing my personal life in any great capacity, but I once mentioned "my partner" and that started a conversation that linked to my pride flags, banners and lanyard pins. Pupils are very grateful to have a member of the LGBTQ+ community in their school. Staff, not so much. In particular support staff and faculties staff. Some teachers are perfectly polite if it comes up in conversation, but again I don't broadcast my personal life. I have rejected staff members as friends/followers on my social media due to the fear of prejudice or gossip. I once raised an issue to a senior member of staff regarding a PSE policy comment I didn't agree with and they point blank said to my face "but there are only two genders, so what's the issue?".

"It's been ok but there's been a shift since lockdown. Parents are questioning stuff that is just hear say but homophobic - looking of leaving and going into a profession that's more accepting."

"It has been positive"

"Mixed. My colleagues are supportive and my pupils are generally unphased but it frustrates me hugely that there is so much misinformation that casual queerphobia which is just brushed under the carpet."

What your experience of being an LGBTQ+ teacher in Scottish education?

"I've not had many negative experiences to be honest. I had an out Gay HT when I came out who was very supportive. Staff have always been great and with kids, some know, some dont, I don't make a big deal of it. I run club and I'm open and honest in there with the kids who need to see that role model. I do all the equality work in the school, it can be very draining to be a one man band and carry the weight of the whole school on your shoulders. It's also very draining feeling like you're trying your best but it's never enough as the homophones language just doesn't stop, kids still use it so freely.

"Overall, positive. My school takes reasonable steps to deal with any homophobia / transphobia through pastoral lessons. It would be useful to see a whole school focus."

"Not great. I present as an ally. Young people are comfortable talking to me. However staff attitudes make me uncomfortable being open. Also, I'm very uncomfortable about speculation regarding my sexuality based on my appearance. I feel none of this is addressed. I feel isolated when I try to address it."

"Largely fine - huge variety among councils. Having recently moved to a council out with the central belt, I have felt more uncomfortable than ever. I will be seeking opportunities to move back to the central belt soon"

"Very positive among staff, however I constantly fear backlash from parents in the small insular community I work in. Lanarkshire can be a difficult place to work and live."

"I have had a very positive experience. Staff and SLT have been massively supportive and when I set up pride in my (Highland) school they went above and beyond to support. Pupils have always been respectful to me but there is still some way to go for all pupils to respect each other"



Findings...

- There are pockets of excellent work happening across Scotland but more needs done for equity of staff and students across the country.
- The current political and social climate re LGBT resentment is a concern for LGBTQ+ educators and this needs urgent attention by councils and leaders on how to support staff during this period.
- LGBTQ+ inclusive education needs to continue to be embedded and looked at across all sectors.
- Educators feel more support is needed for staff to challenge homophobia/transphobia within the sectors.
- Staff felt Senior Leaders in school need more support from Central Teams and other Agencies.
- A more robust approach to equality training and inclusive practice is needed.



LGBTQ+ Teachers Network
(Scotland)

