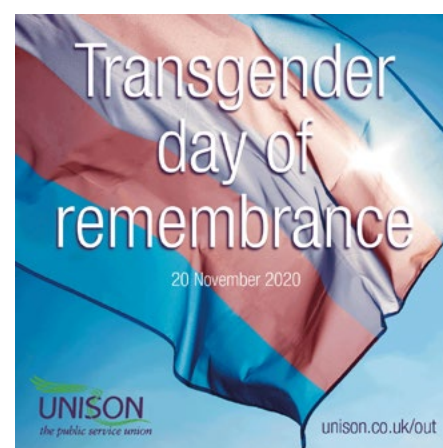


Winter 2020/21 Issue 69

# Outin

The newsletter on LGBT+ equality UNISON

# 2020 a year like no other



Darienne Flemington and Neil Adams  
National LGBT+ committee co-chairs



Who would have known  
this time last year  
that our lives would  
change so much, and  
in so little time?

**As we said goodbye in Bournemouth last year,** we were looking forward to another year of UNISON LGBT+ campaigning, attending pride events up and down the country, and seeing everyone in Liverpool in November 2020.

The national committee met in January, and the committee cycle set for the year. However, news was coming out of China about a new virus, and as the weeks passed, the virus spread and became a worldwide issue rather than a Chinese issue. By the end of February, it was clear that we were in the middle of a pandemic like no other. Each day we woke to reports of more and more deaths throughout world. We watched as whole countries went into lockdown.

Before we knew it, we were in lockdown too. The news each day was more like a horror film than reality. Images of colleagues in the NHS head to toe in PPE, stories of people going into hospital and loved ones not able to visit. Supermarkets with empty shelves, toilet rolls and flour becoming ►

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**UNISON**  
the public service union

virtually impossible to find and local authorities arranging food parcels for vulnerable people.

A whole new language was sprung on us, working from home and social distancing became the norm – and as time passed, we found that the pandemic affected communities in different ways.

At first glance the LGBT+ community didn't appear to be affected too badly, but as you scratched the surface, the realities for our community were clear.

Many of our community did not feel safe where they were living. Many had house mates or family that were biphobic, transphobic or homophobic against them. There was no getting away from them during lockdown. Some of our community had to hide their true selves from the people they lived with.

Others had to return to the family home they had left because of phobic views of family members. Many were unable to return home and found themselves homeless. The Albert Kennedy Trust report that once homeless, LGBT+ youth are more likely to experience targeted violence and discrimination, develop substance abuse problems, be exposed to sexual exploitation, and engage in higher levels of risky sexual behaviour, than their non-LGBT+ peers.

Domestic abuse reporting in the LGBT+ community increased during lockdown. The numbers increased even more once we began to emerge from lockdown, when survivors were able to leave the house and report it.

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At first glance the LGBT+ community didn't appear to be affected too badly, but as you scratched the surface, the realities for our community were clear.

It is well documented that members of the LGBT+ community have high levels of poor mental ill health. The LGBT foundation in Manchester reported that calls to their help line to talk about mental health increased by 50% compared to the three weeks before lock down. That is a staggering increase.

Isolation is another huge issue for LGBT+ people, 30% of LGBT+ people live by themselves rising to 40% of LGBT+ people who are aged 50 or over. For those members who live by themselves and worked at home throughout lockdown, levels of loneliness were even higher.

Many LGBT+ people rely on LGBT+ communities and spaces for vital support, understanding and friendship. Many LGBT+ communities are the family replacement for those that have lost contact with their own families. Lockdown meant that those spaces were unavailable, which heightened the isolation felt, making some LGBT+ people feel invisible.

Access to healthcare has also been an issue for LGBT+ people, with difficulties accessing healthcare for non-covid related issues, and having routine medical appointments cancelled. Many LGBT+ people were either unable to access medication or were worried that they may not be able to access their regular medication. This has been of particular concern to trans people, who need regular hormone treatment.

Many of us have had our routine medical appointments cancelled. Unfortunately, this has also happened to many trans people, who had been waiting years for their appointment at the gender identity clinic, and now have no idea when they may be able to rebook their appointment.

During lockdown, hate crime rates increased against LGBT+, trans and non-binary people as they went out for their daily exercise or shopping for essentials.

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Levels of hate crime continued to increase as lockdown restrictions were lifted. This has been particularly so for trans people, with transphobia increasing – much due to the continued delay in reporting the results of the consultation on the reform of the gender recognition act. This has led to transphobia being rife on social media, not only towards trans people, but for trans allies who speak up for their trans siblings.

The Natcen research on Austerity that we commissioned 2013 and again in 2016, highlighted that years of austerity have already resulted in the loss of specialist LGBT+ services and organisations. During lockdown, 47% of LGBT sector organisations reported an immediate loss of earnings, with consequences such as cutting staff hours and reducing services. Some organisations furloughed their staff, and we know that some have only brought back staff on a part time basis, and that when furlough finished, a number of organisations had to let their staff go.

We join other trade unions and LGBT+ organisations in campaigning for improved funding for specialised LGBT+ services. We wholeheartedly support UNISON's 'No Back To Normal' campaign. We need a new normal, where public services are properly funded, and where specialised services for LGBT+ people is the norm rather than the exception.





# UNISON's first ever virtual Pride

Pride events are pivotal for UNISON regional LGBT+ groups, the best opportunity that we have to be seen out and about, talk about the work that UNISON does for LGBT+ equality in the workplace and encourage people to join and become active in our trade union.

Over the years we've worked with local branches to attend pride events, and in normal times, we are proudly out and visible most weekends throughout the UK from April to October.

This year, COVID19 meant that almost every pride event was cancelled. Many Pride organisers turned to virtual platforms to hold their event, many were social events, some ran workshops and other training events. Our regional LGBT+ groups got involved in many of these events. But we started to look at other ways to promote the work that UNISON does for LGBT+ equality.

The National LGBT+ committee decided early on that they would like to hold a virtual pride event. The

fact that this had never been done before did not deter them, and the date was set for 1st August 2020.

We had so much support, with our General Secretary, Assistant General Secretaries, Regional General Secretaries, Regional Convenors, Branch Activists and Individual Activists sending messages of support. All of these were shown during the event, along with many

hundreds of photographs that we were sent from previous pride events. We also shared every LGBT+ leaflet, factsheet and guidance during the event.

The event was a fun filled fabulous riot of colour, positivity and information. Lots of people attended and commented during the event. **If you are on facebook why not have a look?**

“The event was a fun filled fabulous riot of colour, positivity and information. Lots of people attended and commented during the event”





The organisers of Medway and Gravesham Prides – both recent additions to the UNISON South East Pride calendar – were among those faced with the disappointment of having to cancel their plans.

# Medway and Gravesham Pride

**Gravesham Chairperson Helanna Bowler-Irvine** – who is a proud UNISON member – said that the cancellation was: ‘...a crushing blow for the LGBTQIA+ community because contrary to popular belief, Pride events are not parties, they have been part of our history and culture for over 50 years. They provide opportunities for us to find each other, discover avenues for support, and promote community cohesion.’

The two Kent based Prides have always worked closely together, and Helanna and Medway Chairperson Hilary Cooke were determined to keep going. Hilary said that: ‘We knew that we had to do something for the community during this time and we believed that the best way to do this would be to join forces, combine resources and skillsets, and deliver a virtual event. Thus, Gravesham and Medway Virtual Pride 2020 was born.’ Helanna was delighted when UNISON South East offered to support them: ‘We knew that UNISON has a long and well known history of fighting discrimination and prejudice in the workplace and the South East region in particular has a very active LGBT+ committee, so when they offered to get involved we were overjoyed because it demonstrated to us exactly how dedicated to the community they are.’

“We knew that we had to do something for the community during this time and we believed that the best way to do this would be to join forces, combine resources and deliver a virtual event.”

Area Organiser Patrick Young led a live Q&A session with South East’s LGBT+ committee member Lucy Power, both of whom were on hand to talk about workplace rights and the role of trade unions in tackling discrimination and inequality. Lucy said that: ‘When I was asked to do the Q&A session, I was slightly flummoxed. Two hours of talking about UNISON? I know I’m an activist, but am I really that much of a chatty activist? I needn’t have worried. With the support of Patrick, and Hilary’s gracious hosting, we were soon discussing all sorts of topics. How UNISON supports equalities, our membership, our activism. When one of our regional LGBT+ colleagues joined online, it all added to the mix. Two hours seemed like 30 minutes. The sort of ‘time flies’ that everyone has experienced when chatting with friends. Spreading the word about the support that UNISON provides, and the importance of equalities in this changed world has never been more important. I am so pleased that GMVP were willing to provide a platform to share UNISON’s message.’

Laura Webster, who is an Area Organiser and the South East’s LGBT+ Secretary, said that ‘Our LGBT+ Group have always been a proud sponsor of Prides across the region and we really felt that we were missing out this year with events being cancelled. When we were approached by Hilary and Helanna it was the perfect opportunity for us to connect with Kent’s LGBT+ community and we were delighted to support the event. We very much look forward to working with them again in 2021’

The success of the event was testament to the dedication and ingenuity of the organisers, and a great advert for the support UNISON continues to provide its members in the toughest of circumstances.





# How to forge links with your local Pride organisation groups

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Adria Pittock, Eastern Region  
(and Suffolk Pride organiser)

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**At one level this is a very simple question – just contact them – through their social media or web pages. Tell them who you are and why and how you'd like to get involved. Simple!**

## **Why Pride is important**

The origin of the international Pride movement is both celebration and protest. For over 50 years, starting with the Stonewall Riots in 1969, every year the LGBT+ community has taken to the streets in towns and cities all over the world to raise awareness of, celebrate who we are and to shine a spotlight on where change is still needed.

## **How you can get your local branch or regional group involved**

Prides are at different “stages of development” all over the country. Some of them like London,

Manchester, Brighton are massive and have been around for years and are extremely professionally run events, catering for many thousands of people. Other Prides are very new and very small and put together by a few people in someone's kitchen or on Zoom as is currently the case!

All of them play a massively important role in celebrating the LGBT+ community in their localities and showcasing LGBT + performers, organisations and supportive local businesses. They educate and celebrate, and they can be a lot of fun to take part in and to organise.

Prides are increasingly being attended by young people and are great places to have conversations about what a trade union is, what unions have done for our community and why it is important to join a Union (ideally UNISON of course). It's also a great place to meet up with UNISON members and activists. Presence at Prides puts UNISON on the LGBT+ map.

UNISON has supported Prides for many years and for the smaller and starting up Prides, UNISON can be a really important source of funding. In Eastern Region (pre covid) we agreed a checklist to help us decide which Prides we would prioritise for support.

Prides that we most wanted UNISON to support





in our Region with funding were:

- Free to all
- Having a Parade of some kind or at least taking place in an open, public space to maximise visibility
- Able to give UNISON visibility and a range of promotional opportunities
- Supported by a range of (ideally local) organisations in the business, public and voluntary sector (not just private enterprise) that were serious about supporting LGBT+ people and providing services for them – not just chasing the pink pound!
- Showcasing local LGBT+ performers, artists, acts, businesses etc
- Run by an organising committee that has diverse representation across all sections of the LGBT+ community and is accessible to all
- Taking steps to reduce the environmental impact of the event
- Not only celebrating the LGBT+ community but also raising awareness of what still needs to change.

It's a balancing act – UNISON wants to be at the big, well established Prides to show that UNISON has LGBT+ equality at its heart and supports LGBT+ members. Yet we also want to support new and emerging Prides that are happening in communities where being LGBT+ is still not ok and where visibility for the LGBT+ community is much needed. It is at these small prides that we get the time to talk to people and recruit new members.

Every Pride event has its own arrangements for local groups and trade unions to get involved, there are often categories that show a sponsor's level of contribution and therefore visibility at the event. From a personal perspective, as a UNISON member

“It's a balancing act – UNISON wants to be at the big, well established Prides to show that UNISON has LGBT+ equality at its heart and supports LGBT+ members.”

you can get involved as little or as much as you want. You could literally just turn up on the day and be a member of the public (if you do and you see a UNISON stand – it is really good to go and say hello, they would welcome that) or you could volunteer to be on a UNISON stand (this is fun and a lot easier than you might think – you will be supported and given information about the questions people ask and what to say) and march in the parade with the UNISON banner, or you could go mad and get involved

in actually organising Pride. It's entirely up to you.

Getting involved in Pride often turns regular members of UNISON into more active members, which is a very positive move. UNISON members can be involved at a Branch and/or Regional level in Prides. Pride organisers are often working with the LGBT+ community year round and will be organising fund raisers and generally being proactive in the community. Getting involved is a great way to get UNISON connected with local LGBT+ activities and events.

Now that we are in a Covid era, more Prides are going on-line. In 2021, I expect that a number of Prides will be trying to put on a virtual and real event (if they can). This still involves a lot of work and money and all offers of help – I can guarantee – will be gladly received.

Getting involved with your local Pride is a lot of fun and well worth the effort you want to put into it. HAPPY PRIDE!



# ILGA-Europe diversity fund

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Jennie Antonio

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**ILGA –Europe is an umbrella organisation of over 600 organisations from 54 countries in Europe and Central Asia.**

- **It advocates for LGBTI Human Rights across a range of key areas such as asylum, hate crime, employment and legal gender recognition.**
- **Undertakes litigation work in international courts to advance LGBTI rights as part of wider campaigns.**
- **Provides training and support to member organisations to build and strengthen the LGBTI movement in Europe and Central Asia.**

ILGA-Europe's approach to building the LGBTI movement is to acknowledge the importance and value of the talent, knowledge and skills of activists. It therefore puts peer learning at the heart of its activities. It provides opportunities for activists to learn from each other and co-produce new forms of knowledge. The Annual Conference is a particularly important learning activity, encouraging networking, providing coaching and allowing the flow of knowledge and skills across the region.

Through the Diversity Fund ILGA-Europe offers scholarships for activists who would otherwise be unable to participate in the conference for financial reasons. In this way it promotes inclusivity and a broad range of representation from its member countries.

The Diversity Fund granted a scholarship to the

activist Aderonke Aparta from African Rainbow Family to attend the ILGA-Europe Conference and to participate in an exchange of ideas and learning. African Rainbow Family is an organisation which supports LGBTIQ people seeking asylum and is currently raising funds for people impacted by having no food or daily essentials, at risk of homelessness and who are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19.

Diversity Fund scholarships also support participants from communities who might otherwise be overlooked in the organisations within their own countries, for example delegates from the Roma community have received scholarships to attend the Conference.

With the expansion of the territories included in ILGA-Europe, there are more countries, particularly from Eastern Europe, which are financially less able to send delegates. Scholarships are used in this instance to ensure the widest participation and inclusion of membership countries that make up ILGA-Europe. The recent rise in anti-LGBTI discrimination, phobia and violence in Poland and other locations in Eastern Europe demonstrates just how crucial the role of the Diversity Fund is in building a strong and co-ordinated LGBTI opposition to this erosion of human rights.

The work of the Diversity Fund is more important than ever and urgently needs continued financial support. The ILGA-Europe Conference 2020 may be a virtual one due to the Covid-19 pandemic but we look forward to the future when a physical conference can resume and when scholarships will be needed once more.

Please think about using collections at Pride stalls and LGBT+ History Month events to raise funds for the ILGA-Europe Diversity Fund.

# LGBT+ rights in Poland

**LGBT+ people in Poland face legal challenges not faced by non-LGBT residents. According to ILGA-Europe's 2020 report, Poland is ranked worst among European Union countries for LGBT+ rights.**

Both male and female same-sex sexual activity are legal in Poland. This was formally codified in 1932. Poland provides LGBT people with the same rights as heterosexuals in certain areas: gay and bisexual men are allowed to donate blood, gays and bisexuals are allowed to serve openly in the armed forces, and transgender people are allowed to change their legal gender following certain requirements. Polish law bans employment discrimination based on sexual orientation however no protections for health services, hate crimes and hate speech exist.

Acceptance for LGBT people in Polish society increased in the 1990s and early 2000s, mainly amongst younger people and those living in larger cities. There is a visible gay scene with clubs all around the country, most of them located in the large urban areas. There are also several gay rights organizations.

However, an Ipsos survey in October last year found that a majority of Polish men under 40 believe that the LGBT+ movement is the biggest threat facing them at this time. And this belief runs through all generations.

In recent years, Poland has been plagued by anti-LGBT+ rhetoric. The rhetoric has been largely fuelled by the ruling Law and Justice Party

In recent years, Poland has been plagued by anti-LGBT+ rhetoric. The rhetoric has been largely fuelled by the ruling Law and Justice Party, which has a history of scapegoating LGBT+ people and sexual and reproductive health activists for political ends, under the rubric of attacks on "gender ideology." Senior party members have historically misrepresented efforts to advance gender equality and end discrimination as attacks on "traditional" family values, using such arguments to undermine women's and LGBT+ rights groups.

Recently, local municipalities across a third of Poland have adopted resolutions "against LGBT propaganda" or "pro-family", creating what rights groups describe as hostile spaces for anyone who is not heterosexual or committed to the so-called "natural family". These places are not safe for anyone who identifies as LGBT+.

It's perhaps wise to exercise caution if anyone is thinking of travelling to or through Poland.

In September 2020, ILGA Europe submitted a legal complaint to the European Commission, stating that Poland is violating the fundamental rights of EU citizens and blatantly disregarding EU treaties and standards in their treatment of LGBT+ citizens.





# Involving all UNISON LGBT+ members

Neil Adams and Lucy Power

Every year at LGBT+ conference, we celebrate the best LGBT+ recruitment and organising initiatives.

That organisation also encompasses the various networks / caucuses, including participation by Black, disabled, bi, and trans members. But conference isn't the only place, or way, that you can get involved.

UNISON organise annual network meetings for Black, disabled, bi and trans members. These are a great opportunity to meet old friends, engage with new members, or members who haven't previously been involved with UNISON self organisation.

Each network meeting invites speakers, to talk about a range of subjects that are pertinent to that network. At a previous Bi Network day, a representative from Bi Pride attended to explain how

If you are an LGBT+ member who is Black, disabled, bi+, or trans, please join in and help the LGBT+ voice be heard.

the first ever Bi Pride was being planned, and what we could do to support it. This year's Bi+ network meeting had a speaker from BiCon to talk about the decision to hold a virtual BiCon.

The 2020 Disabled Network meeting invited Dierdre Costigan, UNISON's national officer for Disabilities to speak. Some of the statistics Dierdre provided regarding how disability rights have slipped off the government's agenda were frightening. It reinforced how important it is to work together as a union. Not least the importance of UNISON's equality groups in highlighting and championing the issues affecting us.

Also speaking at the 2020 Disabled Network meeting, was Dave Merchant, who spoke about the Black Trans Live Matter campaign. We are very happy that Dave also spoke on this fundamentally important issue to the Bi+, Black and Trans members network meeting. Using the Black Lives Matter campaign to highlight the intersectionality of discrimination and how we can all provide support.

Usually we would also take the opportunity provided by the network days to develop motions to take specific issues to the LGBT+ Conference. With no conference this year, that was not possible.

We are hoping that our virtual LGBT+ Live! event, will encourage more members, to register and participate in the event – all from the comfort of your own home.

If you are an LGBT+ member who is Black, disabled, bi+, or trans, please join in and help the LGBT+ voice be heard.



I was reflecting on a conversation I had with a colleague recently about Bi Visibility Day and a presentation I was about to do to mark the day, when it occurred to me how little I talk about my own bisexuality. Or more accurately how often I have conversations specifically about bi inclusion, bi phobia and bi erasure.

## Bi+ Visibility we all need to do more

Phillippa Scrafton  
Bi+ Network co-convenor

For the last twenty years my trans identity and UNISON campaigning work has been well documented. When I look back I am incredibly proud of what our union has achieved for trans rights both in our workplaces and in wider society; that I have been able to play a small part in this work alongside some dedicated and talented UNISON activists and colleagues are some of my most treasured memories.

Sadly however, it does not feel like we have achieved the same level of inclusion and acceptance of bi people and this year in particular, when almost all our campaigning is online or in virtual spaces it felt to me like something was missing.

How can it be that in 2020 we often still hear the common stereotypes of bi people included that we are greedy, confused, hyper-sexual, 'actually gay/lesbian' or 'actually straight'? We still have to deal with a representation in the media, on film and in television that is minimal at best and when we do see ourselves, these stereotype are simply reinforced, especially lacking is any real representation of people of colour, trans or disabled bi identities.

A recent report from Stonewall highlighted that peoples experience as having "...disproportionately high levels of hate crime, intimate partner violence, discrimination in healthcare, and mental health issues." The report also found that 18 per cent of bi men,

27 per cent of bi women and 29 per cent of non-binary bi people reported discrimination from within the LGBT+ community!

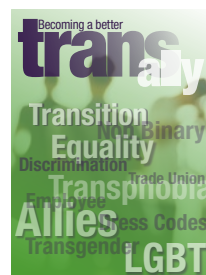
We must do better to be fully bi inclusive, including those within the LGBT+ community. How, I hear you say? Well to start with it is all too common for bi people to be challenged and scrutinised on their identity. One bi person might generally date one gender, another might have been in a monogamous relationship with somebody for many years, they can both still be bi. Believing bi people about our own identity is the bare minimum we should be doing!

Do not assume someone's identity based on their current or previous partner. The gender of someone's sexual or romantic partners does not define them.

Take their lead on the language they use to describe their relationships and identity, whether they identify as bi, pan, queer, any of the other labels under the bi umbrella, or in fact no label at all. Whether it's harassment or a harmful generalisation about bi people, make sure you challenge biphobia when you see or hear it. Please do not leave it to bi people to do all the work. UNISON has a great resource on being a bi ally – [www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/01/25941.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/01/25941.pdf)

Days like the 23rd September serve to remind us all to do more, it certainly did for me. And I urge you to think carefully about how you engage with bi people. Amplify and celebrate bi voices and stories. Days like Bi Visibility Day are a great reason to celebrate us but please ensure that you are also giving our identities and experiences a platform throughout the year.

If you are keen to join our network or find out more about our work of the bi+network please email [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk).



“We must do better to be fully bi inclusive, including those within the LGBT+ community”

# The + and Me The 'Ace'

Penny

**UNISON National Delegate Conference June 2019 was amazing for me. I wasn't at conference but the decision to add the + to LGBT was pivotal.**

I knew instinctively that I came under the + banner and was excited to say that I came under +. I have spent a lot of my life in the closet and feeling a little 'broken'. I have always felt romantically attracted to both men and women from an early age and when I decided to come out 6 years ago, I came out as bi and mostly within UNISON, but I still felt I didn't quite fit. The then LGBT self organised group in UNISON welcomed me with open arms. I couldn't understand why, but after representing UNISON at BiCon in 2015 I knew I didn't quite fit into the Bi community. I began reaching for the closet door again, but stopped myself. I became more active in my region and was lucky to be elected onto the newly named National LGBT+ Committee.

Three months after being elected onto the Committee, a global pandemic happened. Lockdown has been different for all of us, but it gave me the gift of time. Time to read, relax and to be me. And, much to my surprise, I found me. And now I'm definitely out of the closet and very proud of who I am. (Drum Roll)... I am a proud asexual or 'ace' for short. In fact my full title is ... a Bi-Romantic Asexual. It means that I am romantically attracted and can form romantic relationships with persons of any gender, but I don't feel sexual attraction to anyone. I love to hold hands, kiss and cuddle but I don't need sex or particularly enjoy it.

So what does asexuality mean? Well it's not celibacy. Celibacy is a choice whereas being an 'Ace' is who I am, and I could no more choose to be asexual than I could choose to be Lesbian, Straight, Bi, Pan etc. I can fall in love as easily (or not) as anyone else. I can understand sexual humour and innuendo and find it funny. I don't hate sex; I'd just rather not do it. But enough about sex.

So I now finally find where I fit in and feel comfortable and feel that without the + being added I wouldn't feel able to be so 'Out & Proud'. If you have read this far and have more questions then please email [out@unison.co.uk](mailto:out@unison.co.uk) who will forward any questions on to me and I will answer them as honestly as I can.

## Reform of the Gender Recognition Act

Two years since the consultation on reform of the Gender Recognition Act, the government finally announced the results at the end of September.

Despite consultation responses being overwhelmingly in favour of bringing UK laws in line with international best practice, which UNISON, many other organisations and trade unions had called for, the only change was to reduce the fee and move the process online!

Following the announcement, UNISON assistant general secretary for bargaining and equalities Christina McAnea said: "The government has handled this appallingly at every stage".

"They seemed to offer hope, but all they have done is ignite a toxic debate while yet again letting down the trans community. We are not talking about the niceties of a bureaucratic process – this is people's lives.

"We welcome Labour recommitting to change when they are in office. Until then, we will do what we always do – support and represent trans members and negotiate good workplace policy and practice."

Emma Procter, one of the co-convenors of UNISON's trans caucus added: "We are disappointed that the government has not taken the opportunity to make significant and meaningful reforms to the Gender Recognition Act in light of the overwhelming responses to their own survey in 2018."

Co-chairs of the national LGBT+ committee said "It is particularly disappointing and hurtful that the momentum to transform the GRA and trans rights has been hijacked by a few minority high profile declared feminists who have succeeded in undermining the huge swell of support from trans allies, feminists of all genders and non-binary people. To those who would halt and indeed roll back time on equality, decency and fairness we say 'Not in our name!'.



**The Asexual Pride Flag**

**Black – sexuality**  
**Grey – demi**  
**White – asexuality**  
**Purple – community**



TRANS

ALLY

# The importance of trans allies in the workplace

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Kevan Nelson, Regional Secretary  
UNISON North West

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UNISON proudly promotes our equalities policies in political organisations, in community events, in the media and never more loudly than when protesting for the rights of our members.

**But unlike other campaigners** and pressure groups, as a trade union the foundation for all of our campaigning is workplace organisation. In the late 70's and early 80's it was battles against discrimination and victimisation of lesbian and gay members at work that forged UNISON's reputation as a champion of LGBT+ rights. At times this involved confronting the prejudice of elected officials, senior managers and even members within the ranks of our own union.

Decades on, union-wide we have the mutual support and solidarity which self organisation provides as well as a much more favourable (but not perfect) equalities legal framework.

But the workplace can still be a very lonely and vulnerable place for members facing discrimination and isolation. Sadly, too often this has been the experience of trans workers in public services. This is why the role of trans allies is so important. It is vital that our branches challenge transphobia and ensure employers have effective policies in place.

We should always remember that an injury to one is an injury to all.

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## Why it's important to me to be a trans ally

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Penny Smith – UNISON Activist and National LGBT+ committee member

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I deliberately didn't add 'at work' as for me being a trans ally doesn't start and end with my time in the workplace and I'm very proud to be a trans ally 24/7 365 days a year.

I'm proud because as a union activist I will always stand up and protect anyone that is suffering from oppressive and bigoted behaviour.

I have always enjoyed being with my eclectic group of friends and the variety that that brings to my life and I'm thankful to my trans friends who enrich my life by their presence. This isn't me being sentimental or gushing but saying it how it really is. People come into our lives and we make the choice to accept them or not, but our acceptance should be on what's in the heart and nothing else.

As Kevan says, UNISON has always been there for all its members in the workplace and has led the way in promoting equality and diversity through self-organisation.

Self-organisation has been part of the key to UNISON's success. However, being a trans ally in the workplace brings with it responsibilities. Responsibility to be a voice where others have theirs suppressed. Responsibility to call out and challenge discrimination ►

where we see it. Responsibility to stick together. Responsibility to challenge our own fears and phobias. Responsibility to learn the unknown. Responsibility to educate others where we can. Responsibilities aren't always easy to carry out, but we can all try and help those who need us to step up for them.

Unfortunately, transphobia and discrimination towards those who identify as trans is endemic in society and therefore the workplace. We must remember to not assume that we know who is trans or who is affected by anti-trans discrimination. There may be people with a trans history in our branches or workplaces or social groups who are now just living their lives. Other colleagues and friends may have trans family members.

We can all call out inappropriate behaviour and jokes. We shouldn't leave this to trans people, and nor should we allow anyone to suffer in silence. We should try and not misgender anyone and if unsure, then ask, most of us are quite happy to let others know which pronouns we prefer. It is also okay to ask non-intrusive or non-embarrassing questions. Just be sensitive as we should be to everyone.

The first time I went to my Regional Office for a meeting, I was befriended and mentored by a wonderful woman who happily gave up her time to a brand new activist. Our friendship developed and we are still friends, and long may that continue. My friend just happens to be trans.

The most important thing though is that she is my friend and accepts me for who I am too!

### **UNISON has great resources on trans equality at work**

- ▶ [How to be a good trans ally](#)
- ▶ [Transgender workers rights bargaining guide](#)
- ▶ [Model trans equality policy](#)
- ▶ [Guide for reps supporting trans members](#)



## **Why pronouns are important**

**Pronouns, also known as “I”, “they”, “she”, “he”, “we”, “hers” and many others, are a part of our daily language. Pronouns are used as a way to identify or refer to someone.**

**This makes them very important** because they are the smallest way to acknowledge someone's identity. There are lots of articles and discussions on social media as to whether or not pronouns are important, so let's set the record straight: they really are!

Pronouns are extremely personal. Using them correctly shows respect for the person we're talking to — pronouns are a way that we identify with the world, and they move with us throughout our lives.

Most people have the privilege not to worry about others misusing their pronouns. Taking that privilege for granted and failing to use someone's correct pronoun is not only disrespectful and hurtful but can also lead to that person feeling alienated.

It is important to respect pronouns as it validates a person's identity, and you shouldn't assume someone's pronoun. Remember to ask about pronouns when you meet someone or introduce yourself using your pronouns to let others know what your pronouns are.

Respecting people's pronouns is the vital first step in creating an inclusive environment.

There is a new factsheet on pronouns, which gives a lot more information, and also gives examples of pronouns that you could use instead of she or him.

- ▶ [Why pronouns are important factsheet](#)

Whilst the headlines this year have overwhelmingly been about COVID-19, a big step forward for LGBT+ inclusivity in schools quietly took place at the start of the new academic year.

# Inclusive Education and our members in schools



**From September** all primary and secondary schools are required to teach inclusive relationships education and additionally, in secondary schools, inclusive sex education.

This long overdue change in school education arrived in the form of a Department for Education guide, “Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education”. This statutory guidance states that all “Schools must have regard to the guidance”. However, although this applies to academies and free schools, it doesn’t apply to independent schools, though it is still a far cry from the oppressive education system of the Thatcher era, which was overshadowed by the bigoted and hateful Section 28.

Yet this milestone hasn’t been without its own opposition. In Birmingham, running up to guidance implementation, daily protests against an LGBT+ inclusive education programme, No Outsiders, took place outside a primary school and were widely reported in the media. These protests were only stopped when a high court ruling permanently set an anti-LGBT education protests exclusion zone.

When giving his judgement, Mr Justice Warby said the defendants had “grossly misinterpreted” the true nature of the educational programme. A year-long probe by the Commission for Countering Extremism also found evidence that the school protests has been stoked in order to foster division within the local community.

Calls by far right and anti-LGBT+ groups to oppose inclusive education continue and we need to remain vigilant to their attempts to remove our rights and

“  
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educational  
groups

foster division. So, what can we do to ensure inclusive education continues within our schools?

UNISON has a proud history of supporting and working with inclusive educational groups and linking with campaigns, such as Schools Out, Time for Inclusive Education (TIE), Barnardo’s Positive Identities Service and Stonewall. We also welcome the No Outsiders programme.

Many local government branches include school support staff as members, giving them links to local school’s forums and school governing bodies. These branches can support LGBT+ members in schools by using our bargaining fact sheets to help negotiate LGBT+ inclusive policies in schools, making the workplace a better place for LGBT+ school support staff.

- ▶ [www.schools-out.org.uk](http://www.schools-out.org.uk)
- ▶ [www.tiecampaign.co.uk](http://www.tiecampaign.co.uk)
- ▶ [www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/positive-identities-lgbtq-commissioned-work](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/positive-identities-lgbtq-commissioned-work)
- ▶ [www.stonewall.org.uk/schools-colleges](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/schools-colleges)



# Racism in the Bi+ community

Asha Wolfe-Robinson

**It's an uncomfortable reality that there is racism within the LGBT+ community and that is reflected within the bi + community.**

**As a trade union,** we have repeatedly discussed how bisexual people face higher inequalities in accessing health care ([www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Complicated-Bisexual-Report.pdf](http://www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Complicated-Bisexual-Report.pdf)) and have higher incidences of drug and alcohol misuse. NHS England commissioned a study with the Racial Equality Foundation which shows that for instance people from an African-Caribbean background were three times more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia and that Black people were 40% more likely to access mental health services via the criminal justice system.

Being at the intersection of these identities means that there are institutional barriers in obtaining appropriate mental health care. There are also disparities in being offered talking therapies compared to prescribed medication. These disparities are also seen in the experiences of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities as well as different Eastern European communities.

We recognise the importance of finding community with people similar to yourself. The disappearance of spaces that are not centred around alcohol means that people who do not drink alcohol for a variety of reasons cannot access these communities.

Sadly, there is a history of community biphobia, with the London Lesbian and Gay Centre banning bisexual groups in the early 1980s. Overt and covert racism and biphobia on hook up apps mean that choices have to be made about hiding parts of your identity in different places.

However, increased social media usage has meant the creation of communities online with a direct emphasis on support against racism in wider communities.

With right wing and racist rhetoric becoming increasingly widespread in the British government and media, it's also placing pressure on bi+ communities as part of the wider LGBT communities. Bi+ refugees face intense invasive questioning as

“The onus is not necessarily placed on people facing particular challenges but working within our own circles to eradicate prejudices

part of their asylum applications. A paper by Sean Rehaag, published in the International Journal of Human Rights, shows that bisexual refugees were significantly less successful in obtaining refugee status compared to other sexual minority groups in Canada, the United States and Australia. Zeynab Peyghambarzadeh wrote a blog for ILGA Europe regarding the struggle that bisexual refugees face when claiming asylum. (<https://www.ilga-europe.org/blog/why-are-bisexual-asylum-seekers-almost-completely-invisible>)

As James Baldwin said “Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced”. The onus is not necessarily placed on people facing particular challenges but working within our own circles to eradicate prejudices.

## LGBT+ History Month

**It's never too early to start thinking about LGBT+ History Month.**

UNISON has a selection of Rainbow materials that you could use, further information from [unison@tc-group.co.uk](mailto:unison@tc-group.co.uk)



# Unfair treatment of Black LGBT+ asylum seekers

Bev Miller

## **Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Plus (LGBT+) asylum seekers receive unfair treatment on their arrival in the UK.**

The persecution experienced by Black LGBT+ people goes well beyond any official prosecutions. The violence, humiliation, inequality and discrimination many LGBT+ people face. It can be by state officials but is often experienced within their own communities and families without access to protection of any kind.

Black LGBT+ asylum seekers need to show that there is a reasonable likelihood that if returned to their home country they would face serious harm because of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans plus. Serious harm must come from either the government authorities or other sections of the population from which the government is either unable or unwilling to provide protection.

No asylum seeker arrives in the UK as a first choice, often their life is in danger in their homeland. More so for LGBT+ people, with sexual orientation and gender identity seen as a criminal offence. There are 80 countries that consider homosexuality illegal, in five of these the death penalty can apply.

Black LGBT+ asylum seekers are often isolated and alone in detention centres, often treated like criminals. They can be detained indefinitely and often without recourse to legal representation.

Black LGBT+ asylum seekers detained in the UK are often extremely vulnerable; many have already been abused, tortured or raped. If perceived to be LGBT+ they can suffer abuse, harassment or assault from fellow detainees.

English is often not their first language so communication is difficult with interpreters rarely provided to assist. Additionally, they are questioned inappropriately and subjected to ridicule about their gender identity and sexual orientation. At times it is suggested that they just relate to someone of the opposite sex and then they can return to their homeland.

Furthermore, due to stereotyping Black LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are accused of not looking like a lesbian, for example. This represents the culture of disbelief, which infects all Home Office decisions, and this has not been eradicated for LGBT+ applicants. In the overwhelming majority of refusals, the Home Office said that they did not

believe the applicants' gender identity or sexual orientation.

Why should Black LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers be expected to talk in lurid details about their private lives and somehow prove who they are as a person? This is unacceptable infringement of their basic human rights and has been shown to be detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing.

The Home Office is not consistently applying the correct standard of proof i.e. that a claimant's account is reasonably likely. Home Office figures show that they grant only around a quarter of asylum claims that include sexual orientation as a basis for the claim but around a third of the refusals are won at appeal.

However, in over a third of these 'credibility' refusals, the claimants had been telling the truth. These findings are based on the report undertaken by the UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) Still Falling Short, which highlights the unfair and degrading treatment of LGBT+ asylum seekers.

UKLGIG supports LGBT+ people through the asylum and immigration process, providing emotional support and immigration advice; making referrals to solicitors; visiting detention centres and other support projects. They seek to ensure LGBT+ people are treated equally and with dignity in the asylum process; and to improve the quality of Home Office decision making.

Another organisation that works primarily with Black LGBT+ people is African Rainbow Family (ARF) which is a not-for-profit charitable organisation that support LGBT+ people of African heritage and the wider Black Asian Minority Ethnic groups.

ARF was established in 2014 by a lesbian in the wake of some Commonwealth countries in Africa's toxic and draconian anti-gay laws; persecutions and environment which seek to criminalise LGBT+ people for the preference of whom they choose to love. ARF provides support for LGBTIQ Refugees and People Seeking Asylum. They also campaign for Global LGBT+ equality and stand up against hate crime.

As a not for profit organisation ARF rely heavily on donations to continue the vital services that they provide. Like many other not for profit organisations, their income has decreased during the COVID19 pandemic.

Aderonke Apata, LGBT+ activist and Founder, African Rainbow Family said that the existence of ARF means that Black LGBT+ asylum seekers often find themselves in the company of friendly faces, warmth and support since being in the UK when they are connected with ARF workers and fellow asylum seekers. They no longer feel isolated and alone. This improves their mental health and promotes a positive outlook on their gender identity and sexual orientation due to being accepted and made to feel comfortable in their skin.

If you are able to help by making a donation to ARF, please do so by PayPal payment: [PayPal.me/AfricanRainbowFamily](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpaypal.me%2FAfricanRainbowFamily) or [africanrainbowfamily@gmail.com](mailto:africanrainbowfamily@gmail.com)



As co-chairs of the national committee, we quickly realised that the availability of members of the LGBT+ committee members was going to change.

## National LGBT+ committee during lockdown

Some members were furloughed, giving them more time for UNISON activities, some of us were doing our normal job, albeit from home, whilst others were working at the centre of the pandemic, and unable to commit any time at all. We knew that a number of national committee members lived by themselves, and it was clear to us that lockdown could lead to isolation and possibly affect their mental health.

In April we initiated twice weekly virtual coffee/tea breaks, committee members could drop in if they had time and catch up with friends. It has been a great chance to see how everyone is doing. We talked about everything and nothing at all. It also meant that those of us contending with a house-full, who were envious of those living alone, could see how isolated others felt – and vice-versa! We have probably learned more about one another via the video-chats than we ever would have during an actual tea break! The frequency of the tea breaks has reduced, but we still hold them, and hopefully we will continue to do so.

As co-chairs we met with our national officers on a weekly basis and agreed that we should hold virtual meetings of our sub-committees. This allowed us to look at the year's workplan to and work out what works was achievable during the lock-down.

In June the national committee met for the first time – to receive a briefing on the work that UNISON had been doing on COVID19, and given the opportunity to

“We have probably learned more about one another via the video-chats than we ever would have during an actual tea break!”

question the lead officers on the many aspects of this work.

We have met twice since then, once in September, and again at the end of October. Our network meetings have all happened, and were well attended, with many members connecting with them for the first time.

LGBT+ Conference was cancelled, but very quickly replaced by a LGBT+ Live! event over the same weekend..... All of the planning has been done virtually, and we are looking to see many of you at one or other of the planned events.

Yes, we've had the occasional technical problem at our meetings – and the refrain of 'can you hear me' and 'you're on mute' was a common thread for each of them.

All in all, we embraced the virtual world. As much as we are looking forward to seeing everyone physically again, as we go forward, we will need to look at how we can incorporate some type of 'blended' participation.

## Ethical Procurement

**UNISON's national LGBT+ committee has been working closely with UNISON's international team and Labour behind the label to produce a short guide on 'Pride in Procurement'.**

This is for activists planning Pride events to become even more informed and discerning buyers, so that we can promote pride in procurement, as well as in our workplaces, in our communities and around the world.

This is being launched during a webinar as part of the LGBT+ Live! event in November, with a second Webinar / training early next year to answer any questions you may have.

► [Pride in our procurement](#)







# Tackling prejudice

James Anthony  
UNISON Vice President

If you had told the childhood me that rugby would become a powerful force against prejudice and for LGBT+ equality, I would have been pretty surprised.

**There is certainly a common experience** amongst lots of LGBT+ kids of feeling that sport wasn't for them, and that PE was a lesson to dread. But now as an adult, playing rugby is one of the best things I do. And not only that, playing for the Birmingham Bulls RFC, a team based in the gay community in a network of similar clubs throughout the world through IGR, the world group for LGBT+ rugby.

But in some ways, it shouldn't be a surprise. One of the great things about rugby is that it is a game for all shapes and sizes, from the slim quick winger to the hefty slow front row like me. And one thing rugby has is out gay and bi stars, with everyone's favourite referee Nigel Owens, former Wales international Gareth Thomas, or professional rugby league player Kegan Hurst. They have recently been joined by rugby union professional and celebrity X Factor star Levi Davis who more exceptionally is at the start of his career.



“If you thought rugby was just this macho exclusive culture, made up of the kids that bullied us in school, take a look again

On the flip side to this has been Israel Folau, where his homophobic comments resulted in the end of his Rugby Union career. Though he then returned to Rugby League, and playing for Catalan Dragon in the Super League, the reaction of other clubs and supporters has been heart-warming. This included Wigan Warriors deciding to hold their Pride Day to coincide with Folau's game there.

Just as important as these high-profile players is grassroots community rugby. I've played for a local team with a number of out players who were all made to feel welcome, but sadly this is not always the case. Clubs like Birmingham Bulls RFC provide a space for those players to know they'll have a team who's got their back, but also helps lots of players into the sport for the first time, some having been put off by a fear of homophobic reactions.

International Gay Rugby brings together clubs from all over the world, including through major tournaments. At a global level, the Bingham Cup is named after Mark Bingham a gay man and rugby player and one of the heroes who tackled plane hijackers on 9/11 saving thousands of lives. The European version is set to be held next in Birmingham, which is a great opportunity for us to show a different side to LGBT+ rights here in the West Midlands.

With the incredibly disappointing recent leak from World Rugby of their regressive guidelines on Trans players, IGR have been bringing together international opposition and has brought together a strong coalition, especially with Women's rugby around the world. But the fact we need to do this shows just how much work is still to be done.

So, if you thought rugby was just this macho exclusive culture, made up of the kids that bullied us in school, take a look again.

► <https://igrugby.org/>

# Diversity and inclusion in sport

Paul Amann  
Merseytravel Branch

**It is clear that sports clubs can be powerful allies to LGBT+ campaigns, and whilst not always in tune with some trade union issues, they have demonstrated that they can use their reach to have a very positive impact for our members and communities.**

**The 2019 UNISON LGBT+ Conference** passed a motion that highlighted the important role of regions and branches in promoting LGBT+ equality dates with their local sports clubs and encouraged them to attend local Pride events. Regions and branches should where appropriate, work with local sports clubs to adopt diversity and inclusion charters and signpost training to support them to become more inclusive.

Trade unionists and our trade unions have long been in the vanguard of support for Pride events. As individual activists, we have helped establish, fund and deliver Pride events. As members of our unions, we have engaged with our wider membership to provide, very often, the first sponsorship and organisational backing for Prides. Trade union backing for Prides has not only helped deliver the events but made sure these have been delivered in more inclusive and accessible ways that keep the politics of Pride alive.

As a football supporter, I have long recognised the ability of football and other sports to convey messages of inclusion and solidarity. In my city of Liverpool, our clubs had a sectarian potential to rival that of Glasgow. Everton and Liverpool football clubs stood up against this in the 1970s, and fortunately there is now no evidence of this playing out through football in the city. More broadly, 1970s and 1980s football was tarnished with widespread racism, and while not wholly eliminated, it is now broadly socially unacceptable for racism to be tolerated on the stands and terraces.

In 2012, as a member of the club's Supporters' Committee using my trade union experience, I persuaded Liverpool Football Club to be the first

professional football club in the world to march at a Pride event. This gave rise to global headlines, and no doubt innumerable conversations among supporters about why this was happening. This has led to many other clubs now supporting their local Prides and yet more fanbases getting engaged about why their club is showing solidarity with LGBT+ fans and LGBT+ people in general.

This sees not only LGBT+ fan groups, such as Kop Outs, Rainbow Toffees, Rover and Out, Village Manchester, Proud Lilywhites and more, able to march with their clubs, but more mainstream supporters' groups often choose to march as allies too. This solidarity is then extended back to the football stands and terraces, where instead of relying on stewards to deal with abusive behaviour such as homophobia and transphobia, very often it is our allies who are the first to have a word to snuff out abusive chanting.

Sports clubs now use their social media, community and charity foundations, and individuals within them, to provide platform and activity to demonstrate solidarity with LGBT+ people. This sees them marking IDAHOBIT, Trans and Bi Visibility Days, and LGBT History Month, as well as Prides. Our allies in mainstream supporters' groups then very often show their support, not least by helping challenge and educate the few objectors to sports' increasingly inclusive message. This provides a reach and platform far beyond that of our own as trade unionists.

## UNISON LGBT+ Calendar 2021

<b>February</b>	<b>LGBT History Month</b>
<b>March 31</b>	<b>Transgender Day of Visibility</b>
<b>April 17</b>	<b>International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia</b>
<b>April 26</b>	<b>Lesbian visibility day</b>
<b>14 July</b>	<b>Non-binary people's day</b>
<b>September 23</b>	<b>Bi Visibility Day</b>
<b>October 11</b>	<b>National coming out day</b>
<b>November 19 - 21</b>	<b>UNISON LGBT+ conference</b>
<b>November 20</b>	<b>Transgender Day of Remembrance</b>

***Please keep an eye on the UNISON LGBT+ pages of the website as we will update the calendar regularly***