# Supporting LGBTQIA+ colleagues in the workplace: a guide for all

## About this guidance

This guidance has been produced by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and UK SLT Pride Network (Pride Network) LGBTQIA+ working group. A huge thank you to working group members for all their time, input, and resources. We are very grateful.

The RCSLT and the Pride Network hope that the material is useful for all speech and language therapists (SLTs), speech and language therapy support workers, and students, irrespective of whether you identify as LGBTQIA+. We also hope that the material will help increase understanding of some of the issues affecting LGBTQIA+ people accessing speech and language therapy services.

The aim of this guidance is to help raise awareness and promote understanding of:

- the context of working life for LGBTQIA+ people, including some of the intersections LGBTQIA+ people have, including for example, race, religion or belief, disability, and/or neurodivergence; and
- what individuals, teams, services, and organisations can do to make their settings more inclusive, safer and more welcoming, and non-discriminatory, for LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students.

It is important to note that this guidance is just that: guidance. While we cannot direct services on what to do, we hope the practical information and tips we have included on supporting LGBTQIA+ SLTs in the workplace is useful. We hope this will help both SLTs and their managers to discuss, develop and implement workable, practical adjustments to enable all LGBTQIA+ SLTs to participate fully in their workplace, and to feel comfortable, safe, and welcome doing so, including feeling confident to be their authentic selves at work.

Services and organisations may also have their own guidance on supporting LGBTQIA+ people. There is also support available from organisations such as **Stonewall** and the **LGBT Foundation**. The Health and Care Professions Council's (HCPC's) **equality, diversity and inclusion requirements** on ensuring your practice is inclusive for all also provide information.

Our guidance provides a unique perspective informed by the experience and expertise of LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students.

This guidance does not provide legal advice, but links to relevant pieces of legislation are included for completeness.

## How is LGBTQIA+ defined?

LGBTQIA+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual. RCSLT has produced a **LGBTQIA+ glossary**. There is also more information on the **Stonewall website**.

**England, Scotland, and Wales**

In England, Scotland, and Wales, gender reassignment and sexual orientation are two of the nine **legally protected characteristics** under the **Equality Act 2010**.

The **nine protected characteristics** are:

- age
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- **being pregnant** or on maternity leave
- **disability**
- race including colour, nationality (**which includes citizenship**), ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) states that 'In the Equality Act, gender reassignment means proposing to undergo, undergoing or having undergone a process to reassign your sex.' The EHRC notes that, 'To be protected from gender reassignment discrimination, you do not need to have undergone any medical treatment or surgery to change from your birth sex to your preferred gender.' The EHRC also provides information on **discrimination based on gender reassignment**.

The EHRC defines **sexual orientation** as, 'Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.' It provides information on **discrimination based on sexual orientation**.

**Northern Ireland**

In Northern Ireland, policy for sexual orientation and transgender issues is the responsibility of the **Department of Health**. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is responsible for **tackling sexual orientation discrimination and promoting sexual orientation equality**.

**A note on terminology**

We use ‘cisgender’, ‘deadname/previous name’, ‘gender identity’, and ‘pronouns’ throughout this guidance, especially in the **audit tool** and in the **LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice**. We use the Stonewall definition of these words.

- Cisgender: Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-trans is also used by some people.
- Deadnaming/Previous naming: Calling someone by their birth name after they have changed their name. This term is often associated with trans people who have changed their name as part of their transition.
- Gender identity: A person’s innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else…which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.
- Pronoun: Words we use to refer to people’s gender in conversation – for example, ‘he’ or ‘she’. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their and ze/zir.

If you are unsure about any LGBTQIA+ terms, you can check them on **Stonewall’s website**.

## Why does this guidance matter?

Everyone should feel comfortable, safe, and welcome in their workplace. Yet for too many LGBTQIA+ people, this is not the case. Too many people with LGBTQIA+ identity feel uncomfortable, unsafe, and unwelcome at work. **NHS England has said**, "we know that a large number of staff who identify as LGBTQ+ do not feel confident enough to report their sexual orientation or gender expression on their employment record. And we know the weathering effect that microaggressions have on our people." This is not good enough. We must do better.

LGBTQIA+ people face challenges that their non-LGBTQIA+ colleagues do not. Heteronormative and cisnormative privileges directly impact on LGBTQIA+ people in the workplace (and outside the workplace). LGBTQIA+ people are more likely than heterosexual and cisgender people to need to consider if their sexual orientation and/or gender identity means they will be, or will be made to feel, uncomfortable, unsafe, and unwelcome at work, and elsewhere. Allied to this is the unconscious bias that non-LGBTQIA+ people may have towards LGBTQIA+ people.

This privilege and unconscious bias can lead to LGBTQIA+ people feeling unable to be their authentic selves at work. It can lead to them experiencing microaggressions, bullying, and, in some cases, discrimination, related to their LGBTQIA+ identity. This can result in LGBTQIA+ people experiencing inequalities, mental health difficulties, stress, and periods of sick leave. In addition, many LGBTQIA+ people have intersecting protected characteristics, for example disability, race, religion and belief. For these people who are multiply marginalised, the unsafety they experience may be related to these intersections.

Gender reassignment and sexual orientation are two of the 9 legally protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. While the protections of this legislation are good, they are not sufficient. We need to work towards a world where the culture of workplaces is inclusive for everyone: workplaces where everyone is treated equitably, with the same level of respect, and the same level of dignity, irrespective of their characteristics or status. People should not need to rely on the law for that. It is a basic human right.

We all have a role to play in creating safe and belonging workplaces. As a member of the LGBTQIA+ working group said, we must 'walk the walk about being inclusive'. It is also important to note **Cathy Nutbrown's advice** here. Inclusion is a state of becoming rather than a state of being.

We hope that this guidance will help contribute to that state of becoming. If it does, more LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students will feel able to bring their whole and authentic selves to work. This will support wellbeing and retention. It will help to generate better and stronger team working, rooted in respect, trust, and loyalty. We may also attract more LGBTQIA+ people into the profession.

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Beyond all of that, we will have a workforce that truly reflects the population we serve and is more sensitive to and understanding of the needs of the LGBTQIA+ people with communication and/or swallowing needs we work with, their partners and other family members, and their friends.

This guidance is in no way the final word on the issues facing LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers and students. Rather it is itself just the start, a work in progress. Going forward, we want to keep working with our LGBTQIA+ members and their allies to make the speech and language therapy profession ever safer and welcoming for people with LGBTQIA+ identity. We look forward to working with you – to listening and learning from you – to bring about the world that we all wish to see for ourselves, our colleagues, and the people having speech and language therapy that we support every day of our working lives.

That's why it matters.

## Audit tool

The working group identified the need for an audit tool. This was for services and organisations to check themselves against in terms of their inclusivity for SLTs, support workers, and students who identify as LGBTQIA+. The tool also includes a list for LGBTQIA+ people so they can check if their workplace is comfortable, safe, and welcoming for them.

It is important to note that the audit tool we have worked on has, as its starting point, the best possible level of support for LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students. We understand that not all services and organisations may currently meet this standard. We hope this guidance supports them to reach the standard we would all like to see.

**Download the audit tool**

We will review the audit tool over time and would welcome feedback on this tool. Please email **Peter Just** and **Jess Otto-Davies and Kate Boot**.

## Training

The LGBTQIA+ working group identified training as one of the key issues that would help to provide a more comfortable, safer, and more welcoming working environment for LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students.

Organisations and services are likely to have their own training programmes on LGBTQIA+ issues. These may form part of wider training for staff on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues. Many NHS Trusts run active bystander training which helps develop people's skills in identifying and addressing discrimination.

Training specifically on LGBTQIA+ issues is also available from external organisations. These include **Stonewall** and the **LGBT Foundation**.

It is important to note the intersectionality between LGBTQIA+ identity and other issues, such as race, disability, and neurodiversity, as well as socio-economic background, age, and vocation. Ideally, training on these issues should also cover LGBTQIA+ identity. Similarly, training on LGBTQIA+ identity should also ideally include training on other intersections.

If you can share examples of good training, please email **Peter Just** and **Jess Otto-Davies and Kate Boot**.

## Good practice

The LGBTQIA+ working group identified good practice as one of the key issues that would help to provide a more comfortable, safer, and more welcoming working environment for LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students.

Examples of good practice the working group identified included from services and from individuals.

**Service examples**

- Staff induction handbooks including LGBTQIA+ material
- Managers' toolkits including information on access to toilets, name badges, uniforms, safe spaces for disclosure
- Teams having EDI champions
- Training on the intersectionality between LGBTQIA+ issues and other areas, such as race, disability, neurodiversity, as well as socio-economic background, age, and vocation, and how to adjust for this
- Information on the importance and use of pronouns, including information on why some people may not feel comfortable or safe using them
- The encouragement of CPD beyond clinical areas, to include EDI issues
- The use of audit tools on EDI issues
- Supporting LGBTQIA+ staff when the people with communication/swallowing needs are not aware of or accepting of LGBTQIA+ issues
- The embedding of LGBTQIA+ inclusive language into services' work, for example, meetings, discussions, and paperwork

**From individuals**

- Using pronouns
- Being our authentic selves
- Being an ally and active bystander
- The modelling of LGBTQIA+ inclusive behaviours
- Calling in behaviours, not calling them out, to support colleagues' awareness
- The acknowledgement of our own privileges and unconscious biases and adjusting for those
- Recognition of the intersectionality between LGBTQIA+ issues and other areas

**A colleague's story**

We are very grateful to a member of the LGBTQIA+ working group for sharing this story.

*A colleague recently referred to me as 'she' when introducing me to service users. After the session, she said she was very sorry, that she had noticed my pronouns displayed on my email signature and name*

*badge (she/they) and should have checked what I would like to be referred to. I explained I was happy to be referred to as 'she' or 'they' and (briefly) what the pronouns meant to me but thanked her. It made me feel very accepted and comfortable and hopeful for the treatment of future colleagues.?*

**A colleague's story**

We are very grateful to a colleague for sharing this example of how they model gender neutral, and gender in general, pronouns in paediatric community and school settings.

*My approach has been to provide images of lots of people and either name and state their gender or ask the child to choose a boy and a girl in order to avoid my own biases, and then modelling 'they' without expecting the child to use gender neutral they or including it in their targets.?*

If you can share examples of good practice, at service or individual level, please email **Peter Just** and **Jess Otto-Davies and Kate Boot**.

## Resources

There are a range of resources to ensure workplaces are comfortable, safe, and welcoming to LGBTQIA+ people, including LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students on placement. There are also resources available to support LGBTQIA+ people when their workplaces are not, or do not feel, comfortable, safe, and welcoming.

## Resources to support LGBTQIA+ people in general

### LGBTQIA+ working group resources

- **Audit tool for services and individuals**
- **Affirming zones of practice**
- **How to use the LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice**
- **RCSLT Learn podcast about the LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice**

### UK SLT Pride Network resources

There is lots of information available in the **Giving Voice UK Twitter Takeover** that the UK SLT Pride Network did for the RCSLT.

The SLT Pride Network itself has a number of resources:

- **Website**
- **X** (formerly known as Twitter)
- **Instagram**

**You can join the Network online.**

The UK SLT Pride Network's **presentation to the RCSLT 2023 conference** is also available.

### Resources to support getting things right

There are a range of resources available to make workplaces comfortable, safe, and welcoming for LGBTQIA+ people.

As highlighted in the training section, this includes training from **Stonewall** and the **LGBT Foundation**. Both organisations also have other resources available.

- Stonewall has **resources on pronouns**.
- The LGBT Foundation has material on the **NHS Rainbow Badge**. It also has **material for healthcare professionals**.

**NHS and HCPC resources**

There are resources available from the NHS and HCPC.

- NHS England – **belonging in the NHS**
- NHS England – **LGBT+ action plan priorities**
- NHS Employers – **understanding LGBT+ employee networks**
- HCPC – **supporting LGBTQIA+ people to flourish in the workplace**
- HCPC – **supporting transgender employees in the workplace**

**Other organisations' resources**

There are resources from other sources.

- The CSP – **bringing your whole self to work**
- The King's Fund – **tackling LGBTQ+ health inequalities**
- The Mental Health Foundation – **information on LGBTQIA+ people**
- Mind – **information on LGBTQIA+ people and mental health**
- Unite the Union, the union for speech and language therapists, **LGBT+ information**
- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy – **good practice across the counselling professions**

**Resources on microaggressions**

LGBTQIA+ people can face a range of microaggressions. Microaggressions are comments or actions which target a marginalised group of people.

Organisations that have produced resources highlighting LGBTQIA+ microaggressions include:

- **The CSP**
- **The Royal Pharmaceutical Society**
- **The British Veterinary Association**

**Resources on intersectionality**

Resources on intersectionality, specifically race and disability include:

- **15 things LGBT people of colour want you to know**
- **10 ways to be an ally to Black LGBT people**
- **Health and Care LGBTQ+ Inclusion Framework**
- **8 Ways to be a better ally to LGBT Disabled people**
- **5 LGBT disability organisations you should support**

The Pride Trust has **links to LGBT+ faith groups**.

**Resources on being an ally**

An ally is a (typically) straight and/or cis person who supports members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

There are various resources available highlighting how you can be a LGBTQIA+ ally. These include material from:

- **Stonewall on being a LGBTQIA+ ally**
- **LGBT Foundation on being a trans ally**
- **ACAS on LGBTQIA+ pride and support at work**

## Resources to support you as a LGBTQIA+ person

If you are a LGBTQIA+ person, your employer and/or your university should have support available for you, if you feel comfortable and safe accessing it.

If you are a member of a trade union, they might have support available you can access. **Unite the Union** is the trade union for speech and language therapists.

Many of the resources highlighted above should also be able to provide you with support. There are also resources to support you from other organisations, depending on your circumstances.

- The TUC has **advice for LGBTQIA+ workers**
- Gingerbread, the charity for single parent families, has **dedicated LGBTQIA+ resources**
- The National Union of Students has dedicated pages for **LGBT+ students** and for **trans students**
- Citizens Advice has material on discrimination because of **gender reassignment** and/or **sexual orientation**
- The Equality and Advisory Support Service advises and assists individuals on issues relating to **equality and human rights across England, Scotland, and Wales**
- Stonewall has resources to support **disabled and neurodivergent people**

If you know of other resources to support LGBTQIA+ people, please email **Peter Just** and **Jess Otto-Davies and Kate Boot**.

## Charity and partner organisations

This is an illustrative, not exhaustive, list of resources for LGBTQIA+ people on charity and other partner organisations' websites.

If you know other charities/organisations that have resources for LGBTQIA+ people, please email **Peter Just** and **Jess Otto-Davies and Kate Boot.**

- **Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health** – articles, blog posts, links to podcasts (aimed more at clinicians).
- **Alzheimer's Society**
- **Become**
- **Bliss**
- **Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition** – section on resources to support LGBTQIA+ young people.
- **Compassion in Dying**
- **Deaf Rainbow UK**
- **Dementia UK**
- **Hospice UK:**
    - **Promoting equality in end of life care**
    - **Providing palliative and end of life care to trans and gender diverse communities**
- **The Legacy of Leo**
- **LGBT Health (Scotland based)**
- **Macmillan:**
    - **Support for LGBTQ+ people affected by cancer**
    - **Blog post on how to reduce health inequalities for LGBT people in your setting as a health care professional**
- **Marie Curie:**
    - **The reality of end of life care for LGBT people**
    - **Webinar from Marie Curie on creating inclusive and accessible spaces**
- **Mencap**
- **Mental Health Foundation**
- **Mind**
- **MS Society**
- **National Autistic Society** – blog posts about sexuality and gender identity and their intersection with being autistic:
    - **Tom's blog post**
    - **Nick's blog post**
    - **Ashley's blog post**

    - **Sophie's blog post**
    - **Cheryl's blog post**
- **National Deaf Children's Society**
- **Neurological Alliance** – a breakdown of the Alliance's My Neuro Survey. It found that people affected by neurological conditions and who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans often report worse experiences of care, including poor access to support for their mental wellbeing.

- **NSPCC:**
    - **Advice on supporting young people questioning their sexuality**
    - **Explains gender identity and discussing this with children**
- **Sense:**
    - **How Sense supports people with complex disabilities to explore their sexuality and gender identity**
    - **Sense of pride**
- **SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence)**
- **Young Minds:**
    - **Gender and mental health**
    - **Sexuality and mental health**
- **Supported Loving (part of Choice Support)** – Toolkit aimed at supporting people with learning disabilities navigate many different aspects of relationships, including one on sexuality and gender.
- **Regard: Campaigning for Disabled**
- **Sexuality and disability**

## Acknowledgements

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This guidance was co-authored by Jess Otto-Davies, Kate Boot, and Peter Just. Peter is the RCSLT's Head of External Affairs and Influencing. He built on the work started by Padraigin O'Flynn during her time as the RCSLT's External Affairs Officer, to whom credit and thanks are also due.



The RCSLT develops guidance to promote good **clinical** and **professional** practice in line with HCPC standards. **Please read our statement on guidance** to understand how it is developed and how to use it.