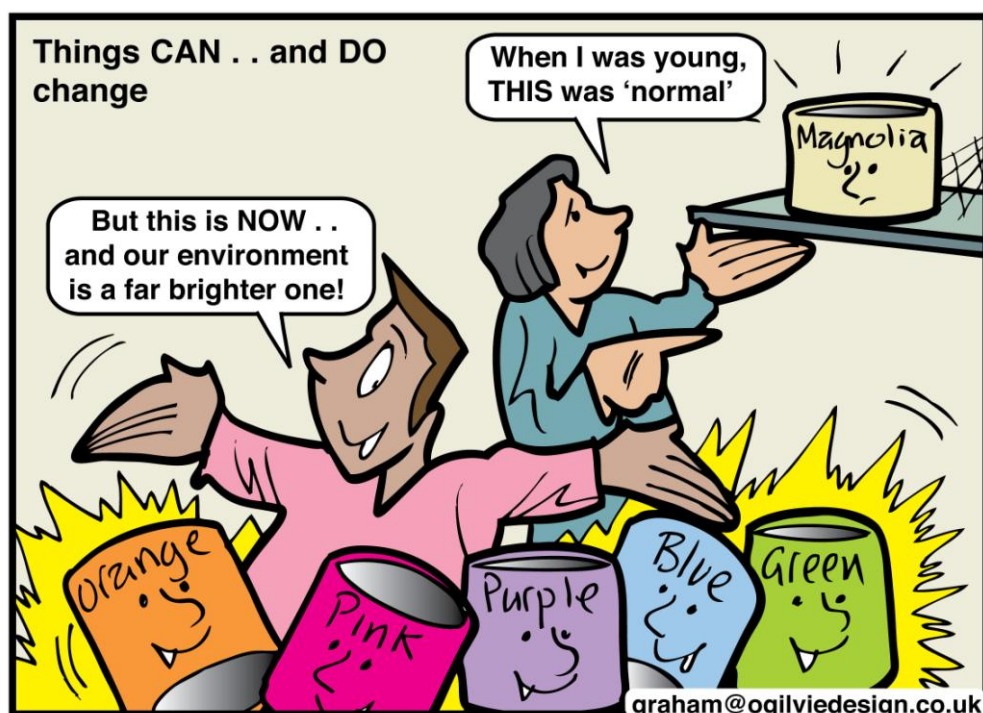


# Project Empower

Promoting Equality in North East Lincolnshire; Sexuality and Gender in Education

Executive Summary, Conclusion & Recommendations (March 2011)



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Full report also available for download at [www.lgbt-nelincs.org.uk](http://www.lgbt-nelincs.org.uk).



## Executive Summary

The *Empower* research project was carried out by the East Coast Centre for Diversity (England) on behalf of the North East (NE) Lincolnshire Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Forum. Funding for the project was provided by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). The project aim was to identify if learners in colleges, schools and learning centres in NE Lincolnshire face barriers to their education and training as a result of sexuality or gender identity (actual or perceived, their own or someone else's). Through questionnaires, forums, workshops and interviews, the *Empower* researchers engaged with learners from school age to 66 and over, although most learners who took part were between the ages of 17 and 19. The project also engaged with education professionals from a wide range of organisations and backgrounds (schools and further education), including teachers, lecturers, support workers, youth advisers and managers.

The researchers found that there are some positive messages to share about how society is becoming more accepting of LGBT people and about the important role that tutors play in supporting learners with LGBT-related issues. However, there is still a lot of work to be done in this area of Equality and Diversity. The *Empower* report shows, for example, that LGBT people and their achievements are not visible enough in NE Lincolnshire's learning organisations. This lack of visibility relates to LGBT people themselves as well as promotional materials and information about LGBT events and groups. It was also seen that there is a lack of coverage of LGBT topics in the providers' curricula.

Some LGBT respondents said that they face barriers to inclusion because of negative stereotyping and some do not feel able to be open about their sexuality and/or gender identity. Some also said that they have faced bullying and sometimes feel left out of things because of sexuality and/or gender identity. Many people, both staff and learners, agreed that language is a significant issue. Wanting to use LGBT language 'correctly' makes many education professionals feel anxious. In addition, language was seen as a way in which prejudice is expressed (i.e. 'She's a right lezza!'), even when no overtly hateful feelings are intended (i.e. 'That book's sooo gay!'). Finally, and overwhelmingly, the project found that staff and learners need space to talk about LGBT topics as this gives people a chance to recognise their misconceptions and see the need, for example, to change language habits which promote prejudice towards LGBT people.

The *Empower* research report explains the above issues in more depth and presents evidence for the project findings. In addition, the researchers have made some recommendations about how to move forward. These include; focussing on the positives to ensure that, where there is acceptance of LGBT people, this is recognised and celebrated. The report also recommends that support is provided for tutors and other education professionals, firstly, to recognise that LGBT learners and their friends and families can face barriers and, secondly, to improve their confidence to support them (ideally by embedding LGBT topics naturally into other curriculum activities). More and better advertised LGBT groups are needed in the local area and more efforts need to be made by organisations and education professionals to promote LGBT role models, campaigns and events.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Issues

The *Empower* Project identified a number of key issues relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) equality in education and training in NE Lincolnshire. Some are positive and include the findings that, in general, people are becoming more accepting of LGBT people and that learners see their tutors as key sources of support for LGBT issues.

Other findings were more negative and include a perceived lack of visibility of LGBT people and their achievements in NE Lincolnshire learning providers. Learners and education professionals also felt that there is a lack of coverage of LGBT topics in providers' curricula. People also identified issues surrounding labelling and stereotyping LGBT people and the fact that not all LGBT people feel able to be open about their sexuality or gender identity in their place of study/ work. The research also found that lesbian and gay people were more likely to feel left out at their place of study and more likely to be bullied. Because of the low numbers of LGBT people who responded to the questionnaires, these findings may not be reliable but they are backed up by wider national research and, therefore, it is the *Empower* team's opinion that they represent wider LGBT views about equality in education and training.

### Barriers

A number of barriers to LGBT equality in education and training were identified:

- Education professionals largely do not see LGBT equality as a key issue in their organisation
- People worry about what language they can and cannot use and sometimes find it hard to understand acronyms (like LGBT).
- There are not enough groups or information about existing groups to support LGBT people and their families.

## **Moving Forward**

We recommend that the following actions are carried out to address the barriers and resolve issues surrounding LGBT equality in NE Lincolnshire:

- Focus on the positives – things are getting better!
- Help teachers and tutors to have more confidence to support LGBT learners and their friends/ families.
- Raise awareness of the impact of using prejudiced (i.e. homophobic and transphobic) language. Ensure that staff and learners stand up to the use of such language, possibly through a ‘zero tolerance’ approach
- Establish and advertise LGBT support groups
- Promote (ordinary and famous) LGBT role models
- Widely promote LGBT campaigns and events
- Provide opportunities for people to talk and for LGBT people to share their experiences with others
- Dispel myths (i.e. sexuality and faith are not always in opposition)
- Ensure wide, embedded coverage of LGBT topics in the curriculum

Download the full report at [www.lgbt-nelincs.org.uk](http://www.lgbt-nelincs.org.uk) or contact us on 01472 311222 ext.428 or email at [eastcoastdiversity@grimsby.ac.uk](mailto:eastcoastdiversity@grimsby.ac.uk).