



# **DRAFT SEXUAL ORIENTATION STRATEGY**

## **Discussion Paper**

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## **CONTENTS**

Foreword 3

Introduction 4

### **KEY THEMES**

Awareness Raising 5

Violence 7

Education 10

Employment and Learning 12

Health 13

Access to Services 16

Same Sex Parenting 17

Local Government 19

Older LGB People 20

Rural LGB People 21

Culture, Arts and Leisure 22

## Foreword

***'equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations will be watchwords for all of our policies and programmes across government. Much has already been achieved and we are committed to working towards a shared and better future for all'<sup>1</sup>***

Over the last 15 years we have seen the face of Northern Ireland change. The introduction of legislation to protect and support those who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual within their job's, homes and in accessing goods and services is to be celebrated. The recognition given to same sex relationships through Civil Partnerships has also played a part in ensuring the rights of LGB people and has removed another barrier to equality. That said there is still more to do.

We must take the opportunity to build upon this good work and increase our understanding of the issues affecting those most vulnerable within our society.

The Rainbow Project has published this document to start the necessary process in developing a Sexual Orientation Strategy and Action Plan. Within this document we have identified key themes we feel should be included in any sexual orientation strategy along with proposed actions which will help to address identified need. These themes outlined in this document are not exhaustive and we feel that it is important to ensure that any strategy is seen as a living document which will regularly need to be reviewed and updated.

OFMdFM should re-establish the Sexual Orientation Strategic Reference Group, as a government led initiative, with community involvement, to lead the process of the development of a Sexual Orientation Strategy and Action Plan and oversee, and advise government, on the implementation of the Strategy.

It is our aim to consult with the wider LGB&T Sector on this document in order to form a cohesive single voice on what we feel should be the pillars of a sexual orientation strategy. We hope that the Office of the First and deputy First Minister, and all Ministers represented on the Northern Ireland Executive, take on board the proposals in this draft, work in partnership with The Rainbow Project in consulting with the wider LGB&T sector and recognise the need to develop and implement a sexual orientation strategy as soon as is possible. We also hope that OFMdFM view this document as **an opportunity to call a meeting of the Sexual Orientation Working Group to discuss how best to approach the task of developing a Draft Sexual Orientation Strategy.**

John O'Doherty  
Director

## Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Northern Ireland Executives Programme for Government 2008-2011

When outlining the key strategic aims which address the needs and priorities for LGB people it is important before examining key themes/issues or areas of focus to understand attitudes and perceptions towards a minority sexual orientation and the different and distinctive issue of gender identity (trans). It is important to highlight that these experiences, prejudices and forms of exclusion can be external or internal.

Where certain words and terms are used to describe attitudes, barriers and prejudice it is important to highlight the need for broadening these definitions in order to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences to understand how this can inform better policy writing, partnership working, multi-agency understanding and inclusive practice.

When we speak about broadening definitions we consider the different perspectives, interpretations and experiences of certain words, prejudices and attitudes for men and women, for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, for trans people, couples, parents, children and young people, for urban and rural communities etc. Government departments and our political parties must consider the multiple identities of LGBT people; and in this way must approach policy, partnership working and practice as a multi-disciplinary activity.

## Definitions

- **Homophobia** is defined as an unnatural fear of/aversion to and/or discrimination against people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual.
- **Transphobia** is defined as an unnatural fear of/aversion to and/or discrimination against people who are transgendered, based on the expression of their internal gender identity. Many trans people also experience homophobia from people who incorrectly associate their gender identity with their sexual orientation.
- **Internalised Homophobia** describes when a gay, lesbian or bisexual person has learnt to, or is under pressure to, accept heterosexuality as the correct way to be due to the absence of positive depictions of gay people and their experiences of homophobia. They can experience higher or lower levels of internalised homophobia according to other aspects of their identity, their support networks and wider experiences of prejudice or acceptance and at different ages and during different periods of their lives.
- **Heterosexism** is a helpful term that describes the invisibility and lack of understanding of gay and bisexual people and their needs, as a result of the assumption by society of heterosexuality. Heterosexism also describes the implied 'rightness' of opposite sex attraction, family life and gender roles indicated by heteronormative traditions and messages in wider society.
- **Heteronormativity** is any of a set of lifestyle norms that hold that people fall into distinct and complementary genders (male and female) with natural roles in life. It also holds that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation, and states that sexual and marital relations are most (or only) fitting between a man and a woman

## Key Themes

### Awareness Raising

Although key legislation has been implemented to protect and support LGB people, many LGB people are unaware of their rights.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
In partnership with the LGB&T Sector develop a campaign to raise awareness among LGB people of changes in legislation over the last 15 years and how this impacts on their rights and lives	OFMdFM The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
In partnership with the LGB&T Sector develop a campaign to raise awareness among LGB people of changes relating to income, pension rights and other statutory financial rights	DFP HMRC
In partnership with the LGB&T Sector develop a campaign to raise awareness among LGB people of changes in legislation relating to employment rights and support for victims of homophobic harassment in the workplace	DEL The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Labour Relations Agency

Although Section 75 (I) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 placed a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their various functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or *sexual orientation*;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

many LGB people and groups lack the capacity to directly respond to written consultations. In order to meet this obligation and to ensure that LGB people can have their voices heard:

Action	Department/Supporting Body
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop guidance for public authorities as to how best to engage and consult with LGB people in relation to policies, strategies and laws that directly affect them	OFMdFM The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Provide financial and administrative support to the LGB&T sector to ensure that there is capacity to truly meet this obligation	OFMdFM

Although there have been many excellent pieces of research developed to catalogue the needs of LGB people in Northern Ireland it is important that this information is as up to date as possible.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
In partnership with the LGB&T sector catalogue all available research to indentify which of these need further developed and updated	OFMdFM
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop a plan to address any shortfalls in current research and both financially and administratively support the LGB&T sector in bridging any such gap	OFMdFM Relevant Departments

Although many people who provide statutory services in Northern Ireland may not be homophobic, many remain in a large part unaware of the needs of and issues affecting LGB people.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Carry out an audit of relevant civil servants and public sector workers training to indentify the possible training need in relation to minority sexual orientation issues	DFP The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop a compulsive training module for all civil servants and relevant public sector workers, on minority sexual orientation awareness.	DFP

## Violence

Violence against people who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual is often invisible and underrepresented in police statistics and other sources for data analysis. This is largely due to the assumption of heterosexuality in mainstream culture and therefore services are tailored to those who have been victims of violence in heterosexual relationships (domestic/intimate partner violence/child abuse and sexual assault) however, violence against LGB people is experienced on a continuum ranging from hate crime, to homophobic family abuse to same sex intimate partner violence and their sexual orientation is often manipulated to perpetrate this violence and maintain their silence.

The status of LGB people in culture and society is significant when analysing how and why this violence occurs and how and why it continues due to shortfalls in education, policy and justice administration.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
All criminal justice agencies should undertake an LGB awareness raising programme, with its staff, including officials and relevant ministers across government, to better understand the complexities for LGB experiences of violence, discrimination and hate	OFMdFM DoJ and related agencies
In partnership with the LGB&T sector implement training with a gendered analysis on violence against LGB people in order to fully comprehend the impact of heterosexual assumptions on policies and strategies that address violence leading to exclusion or invisibility of affected groups	DoJ
Issue messages about homophobic prejudice and abuse publicly and within policy. These definitions of homophobic abuse must be broad to include the experiences of hate incidents, crime, family and relationship violence and sexual violence	OFMdFM DoJ

It is widely recognised and documented that hate incidents/crime in all forms have a devastating effect on victims, their families and society as a whole. It is also widely recognised that homophobic hate incidents and crime are severely under reported by both victims and witnesses<sup>2</sup>.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
In partnership with the LGB&T sector, raise awareness of the problem of hate incidents and crime and provide information about support services	DoJ Local Councils (DPP's)
Implement an educational programme for	OFMdFM

<sup>2</sup> Through Our Eyes, Perceptions and Experiences of LGB people towards homophobic hate crime and policing in Northern Ireland, O'Doherty, The Rainbow Project: 2009

primary and secondary schools, colleges and community groups in relation to hate in all its forms	DENI DEL
Bring together a cohesive and standardised response to homophobic hate incidents and crime in terms of staffing, training, recording, investigation and charges.	DoJ PSNI PPS
Support and encourage the setting up of LGB advocacy worker posts across Northern Ireland in order to improve access to services and to engage with marginalised groups	DoJ OFMdFM

Domestic violence and child abuse research shows that due to the nature of the intimate relationship between family members, often what constitutes violent assault, harassment and bullying and sexual assault in the home between siblings, parents and children or other family relationships can be hidden or excused and victims are afraid of seeking help and betraying family relationships/loyalty.

For many LGB people their earliest experiences of homophobia come from the family<sup>3</sup>. Family members can perpetrate physical, sexual and verbal abuse that is directly aimed at their sexual orientation or blamed on their sexual orientation.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Develop age appropriate educational programmes about domestic and sexual violence, which includes same sex elements, for primary and secondary schools and colleges as well as in mandatory training for voluntary and statutory service providers	DoJ DHSSPS DENI DEL DSD
Ensure that PSNI Public Protection Units receive additional training	DoJ DHSSPS
Facilitate more effective support for victims going through the justice system and raise awareness of this issue with judicial authorities and the community and voluntary sector	DoJ DHSSPS DSD
Ensure emergency and temporary housing and floating support models are studied in order to make them more accessible to LGB people	DSD

For most people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, relationships and sex education does not exist. Often people seek support as an LGB person over the age of 18. Many victims into child abuse and sexual abuse are told that their experiences are ‘natural’ ‘special’ and a ‘secret’ leading to feelings of confusion and isolation.

Messages about physical and sexual safety that are provided in school are often aimed at heterosexual people, and very often heterosexual women. LGB people can be targeted as victims of sexual assault by strangers or coerced into sexual assault by those who are known to them. Due to

<sup>3</sup> Out on your Own: An examination of the Mental Health of Young Same Sex Attracted Men, McNamee, The Rainbow Project: 2006

pervading messages about their sexual orientation and the subsequent hidden nature of many of their sexual experiences many LGB people never report sexual violence, are unsure where to turn for support, or if they do access support are often met with heterosexist assumptions and/or ignorance. Another consequence of these messages and invisibility are the risks posed to their physical and sexual safety, which can lead to victims blaming themselves for assault and violence, who are then isolated and unwilling to report to the police or seek help elsewhere.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Department/Supporting Body</b>
Include issues of same sex sexual and physical health in age appropriate educational programmes for primary and secondary schools and colleges as well as in mandatory training for voluntary and statutory service providers	DENI DHSSPS DEL

## Education

One of the biggest threats facing LGB youth is homophobic bullying<sup>4</sup>. Homophobic bullying includes any language or behaviour which demeans or intimidates a person because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Both The Rainbow Project and Stonewall (UK) have gathered evidence of young LGB people in education and their experiences of homophobic bullying.

- 98% of LGB young people hear derogatory and homophobic language in school and half of all teachers fail to respond to homophobic language when they hear it<sup>5</sup>.
- 65% of LGB young people have experienced negative behaviour in school because of their sexual orientation and 44.7% had experienced direct bullying which involved either violence, the threat of violence or victimisation<sup>6</sup>.
- 85% of LGB young people have considered suicide and 35% have attempted suicide<sup>7</sup>.
- 17% of LGB young people have received death threats because of their sexual orientation<sup>8</sup>.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Ensure that schools specifically refer to homophobia by name in all anti-bullying and behaviour policies	DENI
In partnership with schools ensure that anti-bullying and behaviour policies state the values and aims of their school, that they welcome all students and that all students have the right to be respected and feel safe in school regardless of their sexual orientation	DENI
In partnership with schools and community led organisations educate all pupils as to what constitutes homophobic bullying, why it is contrary to the values of the school and what the consequences will be for those who engage in homophobic bullying	DENI DSD
In partnership with schools ensure that all staff receives sexual orientation awareness training so that they can recognise homophobic bullying when they see it and feel confident in tackling it.	DENI

We now live in a society where the rights of LGB adults are protected in law. We, in Northern Ireland, have some of the most comprehensive equality provisions in the world and yet we do not teach these values to our young people when they are in school. Schools must prepare students for the world in which they will work and teaching them how to conduct themselves with appropriate

<sup>4</sup> The School Report, Stonewall (UK): 2006

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Out on your Own: An examination of the Mental Health of Young Same Sex Attracted Men, McNamee, The Rainbow Project: 2006

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> The School Report, Stonewall (UK): 2006

respect for others is a fundamental part of this. Pupils must be taught how to conduct themselves appropriately in the workplace and for this to be carried out appropriately.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Ensure that all students are aware that the use of derogatory, homophobic language is not acceptable in workplaces and that it can result being disciplined or removed from post when in employment	DENI DEL
Ensure that all students are aware that at some point in their working life they will have LGB colleagues, employers or employees and that all of these people have the right to work free of harassment based on their sexual orientation	DENI DEL

Although it may not be explicitly taught, from the moment they enter school to the day they leave LGB people are at best, ignored, and at worst, reviled. LGB young people are consistently told that their lives, their feelings and their relationships are of less value than their heterosexual peers.

Young LGB people are given no education on how to form relationships or engage in safer sex and therefore they often have difficulty in forming stable relationships and can engage in high-risk sexual practices. Schools must ensure that they promote the welfare of all students, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Ensure that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is of use to all students, including LGB young people	DENI
Ensure that all RSE makes reference to same-sex relationships and that there is information on safer sex for LGB young people.	DENI DHSSPS

## Employment and Learning

While there are strong legislative protections in Northern Ireland against discrimination in the workplace, further and higher education institutions and for those undertaking training on the basis of sexual orientation, evidence shows that LGB people still experience isolation and bullying, both verbal and physical in the workplace due to their sexual orientation<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, evidence shows that one in four LGB people are still not out in work<sup>10</sup>.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Financially and administratively support the LGB&T sector in delivering the recommendations of Through Our Eyes (Employment) 2011	OFMdFM DSD DEL

Higher education and training plays a significant role in the economic development of Northern Ireland. LGB people suffer higher incidents around some particular issues that may impact on an individual's ability to engage with and complete further education opportunities. For example, there is a greater risk of LGB people being estranged from their family and having no family or financial support throughout their further education or training<sup>11</sup>. This, and other issues, are not currently acknowledged or addressed by government. An effort needs to be made to establish the entire scope of these issues and determine what actions should be taken.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Explore how higher education institutes (including training bodies) can meet existing and future legislative requirements protecting LGB people from discrimination	DEL Regional Colleges Universities
In partnership with the LGB&T sector implement measures to proactively promote and advance LGB equality in higher education institutions (and training bodies)	DEL Regional Colleges Universities

<sup>9</sup> Through Our Eyes, Experiences of LGB People in the Workplace, McDermott, The Rainbow Project: 2011

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Advancing LGB Equality: Improving the experience of LGB staff and students in higher education, Equality Challenge Unit: 2010

## Health

As identified within the New Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, vulnerable and at risk groups are a key identified group. Local research indicates a greater misuse of drugs and alcohol within the LGB&T community, primarily as a coping mechanism<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, alcohol appears to play a big part in gay life. Some of those interviewed spoke of alcohol use as part of the culture. 71.6 per cent of gay men had tried drugs or solvents at least once compared to 29.1 per cent of the population as a whole (NACD/DAIRU 2003). This mirrors other national and international research that LGB people were more likely to drink and use recreational drugs (Moore et al 1997, Bontempo & D’Augelli 2002, Morrison & L’Heureux 2001). It is reported in other studies that internalised homophobia and low self-esteem they can lead to self-destructive behaviour, including unsafe sex and alcohol and drug misuse (Valentine, Skelton & Butler 2002, Aggleton et al 2000).

Action	Department/Supporting Body
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop a scoping exercise to measure current levels of consumption of alcohol and drugs within the LGB community	DHSSPS PHA
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop a targeted campaign of awareness among the LGB community of the impact of alcohol and drugs	DHSSPS PHA
In partnership with the LGB&T sector work to ensure the provision of regional Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous which are staffed or supported by people with specific sexual orientation awareness training	DHSSPS PHA
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop community based services provision to tackle addiction within the LGB&T community	DHSSPS PHA
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop sexual orientation awareness training for those working in the Alcohol and Drugs sector to make them aware of LGB&T issues	DHSSPS

The Mental Health Promotion Strategy 2003 -2008, currently under review and due out soon for consultation as a refreshed Strategy, indicated the increased risk among LGB people of mental ill-health.

It is not that being LGB has any direct correlation to poorer mental health, but rather the experiences of homophobia, heterosexism at a societal level and in service provision and stigma, isolation and prejudice that contributes to poorer mental health outcomes for LGB people. The Suicide Prevention Strategy 2006 -2011 – Protect Life indicates the increased risk among LGB people. The evidence review of the Strategy in 2009 red lighted the two specific action points relating to vulnerable and marginalised groups, which includes LGB people.

<sup>12</sup> Out on your Own: An examination of the Mental Health of Young Same Sex Attracted Men, McNamee, The Rainbow Project: 2006

The shOUT Report 2003 – The Needs of Young People in Northern Ireland who identify as LGB&T. Youthnet and DENI: 2003

<b>Action</b>	<b>Department/Supporting Body</b>
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop a targeted campaign of mental health promotion within the LGB community	DHSSPS PHA
Review training standards for mental health professionals to identify gaps in awareness of LGB issues	DHSSPS
Ensure that all mental health promotion training programmes include specific reference to the increased risk identified within LGB Community	DHSSPS
Support the LGB&T sector in increasing the capacity for community based provision of mental health support services at both a regional and local level	DHSSPS
Ensure that monitoring on sexual orientation of service users is implemented for all organisations supported under the aforementioned strategies	DHSSPS
Ensure that the Self-Harm Registry Pilot includes monitoring of sexual orientation	DHSSPS
Provide counselling specific sexual orientation awareness training to counsellors and counselling organisations supported under the aforementioned strategies	DHSSPS
Provide sexual orientation awareness training to organisations funded under the aforementioned strategies	DHSSPS

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that LGB people may be at risk of experiencing health inequalities in terms of risk to cancer<sup>13</sup>. For lesbian or bisexual women, there are issues around access to cervical smears and level of subsequent uptake and a greater incidence of breasts cancer, due to the lower levels of parenthood. For gay or bisexual men there may be some concerns around anal and oral cancers related to a greater incidence of HPV and related cancers.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Department/Supporting Body</b>
In partnership with the LGB&T sector implement a targeted campaign to increase uptake of cervical smears among L/B women;	DHSSPS
In partnership with the LGB&T sector implement a targeted campaign to increase uptake of breast screening among L/B women	DHSSPS
Commission further research into anal and oral cancers among gay and bisexual men;	DHSSPS
Commission further research scoping health inequalities of L/B women	DHSSPS
Ensure that monitoring of sexual orientation data for those accessing screening services and treatment is routine	DHSSPS

<sup>13</sup> Invisible Women' – A review of the impact of discrimination and social exclusion on Lesbian and Bisexual Women's health in Northern Ireland; Marie Quiry: 2007

The Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2013, which aims to improve the sexual health of the entire population, highlights gay and bisexual men as a priority group that requires particular attention. CDSCNI reports on STI and HIV infection rates for NI – All infections disproportionately affect men-who-have-sex- with-men (MSM); this is particularly evident with HIV and Syphilis.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Department/ Supporting Body</b>
Implement the Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan with a focus on the priority groups identified within the document	DHSSPS
Work in partnership with the LGB&T sector to address the needs identified for gay and bisexual men and MSM	DHSSPS PHA
Implement NICE guidelines on 'Increasing the uptake of HIV testing to reduce undiagnosed infection and prevent transmission among men who have sex with men' in partnership with the Public Health Agency and GUM clinics	DHSSPS

Due to fear of homophobia and hetrosexisim many men who have sex with men feel they cannot access mainstream sexual health services.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Department/Supporting Body</b>
Develop innovative testing services to target high risk MSM e.g. POCT for HIV & Outreach Services	DHSSPS
Develop specific GUM services that target MSM into mainstream healthcare provision.	DHSSPS

## Access to Services

Many services profess that they are open to everyone. The research base indicates that people who are LGB prefer to access LGB specific services<sup>14</sup>. This is due to homophobia, heterosexism, the fear of these and the impact of internalised homophobia. In addition, many people may not disclose minority sexual orientation, for fear of a homophobic response, or a lack of understanding by the service provider.

Further to this, many professions do not have LGB awareness intrinsic to their training programmes, so the expectation that professionals have an understanding of LGB issues is an unsupported one. This is particularly relevant to Mental Health Professionals, Teachers, Youth Workers, Community Workers, Social Workers and the Health Promotion sector.

Most services collate data on those accessing services, by age, sex, demographics, ethnicity. Very few monitor the Sexual Orientation of service users providing no evidence for the uptake of services by LGB people.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Ensure that monitoring of sexual orientation is carried out across all health services where there is proven evidence of health inequalities experienced by LGB people	DHSSPS PHA
In partnership with the LGB&T sector develop a standardised cross-departmental good practice guide for making community, voluntary and statutory service providers LGB friendly	OFMdfM DFP
In partnership with the LGB&T sector ensure the provision of sexual orientation awareness training to service providers working in fields which LGB people are more likely to access	DFP

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<sup>14</sup> Invisible Women' – A review of the impact of discrimination and social exclusion on Lesbian and Bisexual Women's health in Northern Ireland; Marie Quiry: 2007  
Out on your Own: An examination of the Mental Health of Young Same Sex Attracted Men, McNamee, The Rainbow Project: 2006

## Same Sex Parenting

In Northern Ireland, the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 defines in Articles 14 & 15 that adoption can be undertaken by a married couple or one person.

Civil partners are not allowed to adopt jointly in Northern Ireland as civil partners. It is often the case that the adoption application would be done by an individual. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 did not amend our adoption laws in Northern Ireland and there was a review to be commenced in 2006 but has not happened to date.

With the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (in England) in 2005 it allowed civil partners to adopt a child jointly and for a person to acquire parental responsibility for their civil partners child. The key provisions would be section 50,51 and 144 which defines a couple as a married couple, civil partners, or two people of different sexes or of the same sex living as partners in an enduring family relationship. This legislation is not operational in Northern Ireland.

The fundamental challenge when approving couples for adoption is to satisfy an enduring family relationship by evidencing commitment between the both applicants and with the child also. Whilst we wait for adoption laws to be reviewed in Northern Ireland we do not ask for extended rights beyond the rights of unmarried heterosexual couples but parity between couples who are married and couples who are civilly partnered.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Review and update adoption law to make it possible for couples in a civil partnership to adopt a child jointly in the way that married heterosexual couples can	DHSSPS OFMdFM
Review and update adoption law to ensure that same sex attracted couples can jointly adopt ensuring a structured and safe family environment for the adopted child	DHSSPS OFMdFM
Adoption leave being available for one carer of an adopted child, regardless of gender, should be explicitly demonstrated in policy and best practice recommendations in relation to same sex attracted couples	OFMdFM

Previously those working in fertility treatment clinics were charged with the legal responsibility to consider the child's need for a father. This was used by some clinics and health professionals to refuse treatment to same sex couples and single women. However in 2008 the legislation was reviewed and some amendments were made to make treatment more accessible.

As of October 2009 the law calls for those working in fertility clinics to consider the child's need for supportive parenting. This has opened the door for single women and lesbian couples who want to access treatment from the NHS. Fertility clinics are still able to use other criteria when deciding who they can treat, such as those with fertility problems. For example medical infertility is used as a criteria for access to publicly funded treatment and many same sex couples are turned away on the grounds that they have no "medical" infertility problems. Any woman who has a medical reason for infertility is eligible for NHS funded treatment regardless of her sexual orientation.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Introduce new measures to ensure that any couple who cannot conceive a child through natural means, including same sex relationships between women, can access fertility support	DHSSPS

For same sex couples who co-parent together and their relationship breaks down, there is very little explicit support and policy that supports the rights and provides information for the LGB non-biological parent.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Encourage partnerships between civil court judiciaries, voluntary and statutory family support organisations, legal professionals and LGB organisations and groups to develop information and support systems	DoJ
Develop compulsory information to be issued about joint/shared parental responsibility and the necessary legal processes and protection for both parents and the child	DoJ

For some same-sex couples who want a genetic relationship with their children or who are unable to conceive, they undertake a complex and sensitive surrogacy arrangement. In part, due to the rarity of surrogacy arrangements for heterosexual or same sex couples, unfortunately there is no real legal support or protection for the new parents of a child born via a surrogacy arrangement.

Action	Department/ Supporting Body
Clear information should be developed and issued about having a child through a surrogacy arrangement issued explicitly for same-sex couples including information about the legal process of obtaining a Parental Order via the court	DHSSPS DoJ
Statutory surrogacy/parental leave provisions implemented through law to allow one parent (regardless of gender) paid time off to care for and bond with their child and return to the same or equivalent job, in the same way that an adoptive parent or heterosexual mother is allowed this time and financial compensation	OFMdFM DHSSPS

## Local Government

It remains the case that over the next number of years, processes that have been put in place regarding the Review of Public Administration will come to fruition. These changes will result in a number of significant central government functions being devolved to local authorities that will have a direct impact on communities in terms of development and planning.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Ensure that recognition is given to the diversities that exist in communities and that the experiences and needs of LGB people are recognised in new community planning structures	DoE DSD
Ensure that measures are built into the transfer process, so that where an evidence base exists that highlights a requirement, the inclusion of LGB people will be realised in the new community planning processes	DoE DSD

Significant changes will be occurring to the structures and make up of District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships, resulting in further responsibilities being devolved to local communities regarding community safety. It remains the case that historically LGB people have been excluded from these structures, as well as issues faced by LGB people and safety generally.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Ensure that these new structures have membership quotas in place to take account of diverse communities, ensuring that new partnerships are fully representative of the wider communities that they serve	DoJ
Ensure that engagement with the LGB community is mandatory within the engagement functions of the new partnerships	DoE DoJ Local Councils

## Older LGB People

As Northern Ireland adapts to accommodate, nurture and provide for an increasingly ageing population consideration must be given to a large group of this population who identify as LGB and have concerns and fears about their quality of life, care and setting in an environment with a largely heterosexual bias/experience. Whilst developing policies and practices that promote diversity and preserve dignity for older people, needs based consideration should be given to those who are LGB and their partners and families. Some of the common fears and experiences of LGB people as they age are:

Ageing and dying alone because they are cut off or isolated from family members, friends and neighbours due to their sexual orientation.

Being placed in a non- LGB friendly caring home and being harassed, intimidated and bullied because of their sexual orientation by other residents and/or staff

Partners and family members being excluded or overlooked as caregivers in the ageing experience

Professional caregivers and decision makers having very little training and experience to deal with LGB peoples requirements.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Develop understanding about the needs of older LGB people	OFMdFM
Develop compulsory training packages for all statutory and voluntary health and social care professionals. It must also encourage best practice across all sectors in terms of continuing training and updating training for all staff and volunteers	DHSSPS PHA
Ensure resources are allocated in terms of housing, accommodation, carers allowances for LGB people, their partners and families	DSD
Developing support networks for LGB victims of elder abuse and create appropriate partnerships to allow the reporting and addressing of LGB elder abuse	OFMdFM DHSSPS

## Rural LGB People

Many LGB people report feelings of isolation and exclusion, leading to feelings of depression and anxiety due to issues such as homophobia in society and families as well as issues around a predominantly heterosexist culture.

Anecdotally, these issues seem to be more acute for people who identify as LGB who live in rural areas across Northern Ireland.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Department/Supporting Body</b>
In partnership with the LGB sector carry out research which scopes the experiences of LGB people living and/or working in rural areas in Northern Ireland	DARD
In partnership with the LGB&T sector implement measures to proactively promote and advance equality for LGB people living and/or working in rural areas in Northern Ireland	DARD DHSSPS DENI DoJ

## Culture, Arts and Leisure

### Sport

Research indicates that homophobic language and abuse is common place in sports and that there may be particular issues in terms of homophobia in youth sports<sup>15</sup>.

Tackling homophobia in sport at all levels, making sport more LGB friendly and nurturing a safe and welcoming environment for LGB people to be themselves while enjoying sport, within and throughout all sporting disciplines, either as spectators or participants, must be a priority for the Northern Ireland Executive.

Action	Department/Supporting Body
Through the Sports Matters Implementation Group develop an LGB participation strategy, including an element of awareness raising, to be integrated into the Sports Matters Strategy under target PA 9.	DCAL Sport NI
In partnership with the LGB&T Sector, develop a Sports Charter for sports clubs and organisations which commit them to tackling homophobia (and transphobia) in sport and develop tools to assist clubs and organisations in achieving this.	DCAL Sport NI

### Culture and Arts

There is a thriving and rich culture which is shared by many people who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual. Beyond some volunteers in the LGBT sector, this positive, rich and vibrant history and culture does not tend to be promoted when we as a society seek to promote culture here in Northern Ireland. We believe there is an opportunity now to begin to positively promote the history and culture of the LGBT community and individuals who identified as LGB, to help broaden peoples understanding of culture and move beyond the dominant view in Northern Ireland that we are a society with only two different traditions and cultures. In reality, Northern Ireland's culture and tradition is made up of many combinations of rich, diverse and complex experiences by communities. The government should seek to recognise and celebrate this.

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/research\\_and\\_policy/2881.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/what_we_do/research_and_policy/2881.asp)

<b>Action</b>	<b>Department/Supporting Body</b>
Secure and promote Belfast Pride as a major tourist event for Northern Ireland	DCAL DETI
Scope the opportunities to support and develop Foyle Pride as a major tourist event for the North West.	DCAL DETI
Develop a formal programme for the promotion of LGBT history month in a variety of professional, educational, social and festival settings.	DCAL
Identify and commit long term financial resources for the OUTBURST Queer Arts festival	DCAL DSD