

Stonewall **SUPPORTING
EARLY CAREER
LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN
THE WORKPLACE**



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The UPS Foundation

SUPPORTING EARLY CAREER LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is one part of a larger ‘*Nurturing LGBTQ+ Talent*’ project generously funded by The UPS Foundation.

This resource starts with insights from early career LGBTQ+ people and then looks at three key areas of good practice, including case studies from organisations:

- Recruitment
- Onboarding
- Development and retention

All workplaces are different, what we offer in this resource are suggestions and ideas. We invite you to take from it what might work for your organisation and use your expertise to tailor good practice to your specific context. If you’d like to learn more about how Stonewall can support with your LGBTQ+ inclusion work, email us at prospect@stonewall.org.uk. We’d love to hear from you.

Who is this resource for?

This resource is for any organisation aiming to support its LGBTQ+ staff in the UK. It may be particularly useful for people who are involved in making the workplace more inclusive – for example, staff in Human Resources; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) teams; and/or your organisation’s LGBTQ+ network group.

How was this resource developed?

40 inspiring LGBTQ+ leaders aged between 20-30 took part in a 2.5-day Young Leaders Programme run by Stonewall. A number of delegates then participated in a roundtable discussion, sharing their insights into how to make workplaces more inclusive for early career LGBTQ+ people. Their ideas, alongside Stonewall’s good practice developed from over 30 years of working with organisations committed to creating inclusive workplaces, are combined in this resource. It is based on the expertise of those with relevant lived experience so that it directly addresses the concerns and needs of early career LGBTQ+ people.

WHY DO WE NEED TO SUPPORT EARLY CAREER LGBTQ+ PEOPLE?

Today, LGBTQ+ people face a range of barriers when it comes to finding – and remaining in – roles that allow them to make the most of their skills and be themselves at work. Our [Shut Out](#)¹ report (2020) which looked into the experiences of LGBT young people not in education, training or work highlighted the unique barriers many face. Those who had some experience of work faced particular challenges relating to their LGBT identities.

Participants repeatedly highlighted issues including:

- anti-LGBT abuse and language in the workplace;
- workplaces where policies and practices were non LGBT-inclusive; and
- poor mental health support at work.

These problems were compounded by wider issues, including limited job opportunities and little progression within roles.

Our [LGBT at Work](#)² report (2018) showed that 35% of LGBT staff have hidden that they are LGBT at work for fear of discrimination. Alongside this, workers who are also members of other minoritised groups faced even more challenges. For example:

- 12% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT employees had lost a job because of their identity in the year the research took place compared to 4% of white LGBT staff.
- Six times as many trans people (12%) reported being physically attacked at work because of their identity than cisgender LGB people (2%).
- 16% of LGBT disabled staff reported being denied jobs or promotions because of their identity, compared to 10% for LGBT staff in general.

In our work with early career LGBTQ+ people, some tell us that their age, as well as their LGBTQ+ identity, can pose challenges at work. So, whether it’s hearing anti-LGBTQ+ comments at work, not being taken seriously as a young person, or getting a dream role only to find that the workplace isn’t equipped to support trans staff – the reasons why early career LGBTQ+ people need particular support are varied.

1 This report uses the term ‘LGBT’ rather than ‘LGBTQ+’.

2 This report uses the term ‘LGBT’ rather than ‘LGBTQ+’.

EXPERIENCES OF EARLY CAREER LGBTQ+ PEOPLE AFTER ENTERING THE WORKPLACE

After the Stonewall LGBTQ+ Young Leaders Programme, participants came together in a focus group to share their experiences and reflections about being LGBTQ+ in the workplace. We have gathered these together in this section.

EXPERIENCE	EXAMPLE	IMPACT
Being tokenised at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being the only LGBTQ+ person at work and feeling the need to represent everyone who shares their identity. Being asked to work on projects related to LGBTQ+ issues, even if they don't have specific expertise. Being used as a subject matter expert on all LGBTQ+ issues. Being – or being seen as – a 'diversity hire', as opposed to having been hired based on skills and experience. 	<p>Being tokenised could erode LGBTQ+ people's confidence and make them lose enthusiasm for the role they've been hired to do.</p> <p>Being assumed to be the expert on LGBTQ+ matters and feeling the need to represent the community can put unnecessary pressure on people early in their career.</p>
Struggling to be out at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trying to determine whether it would be possible and safe to be out in a new workplace. Needing to come out repeatedly, to different people and in different contexts. 	<p>When LGBTQ+ people can't be out – or have to repeatedly come out – at work, it can add a great deal of stress to their role, which negatively impacts their mental health.</p>
Struggling to be their authentic self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needing to hide parts of their identity – for example being LGBTQ+ while also being a Person of Colour, working class, and/or disabled. Feeling unable to fully share their experiences or opinions. Needing to tone down parts of their identity to fit in. This might involve using more formal language or accents, wearing clothing that doesn't fit someone's gender expression, avoiding discussing relationships or sharing pronouns. 	<p>When LGBTQ+ people need to tone down aspects of their identity, it impacts their mental health and their ability to do great work.</p> <p>When people can bring their whole selves to work, they are more likely to stay in roles for longer and aim to progress within an organisation.</p>

Low confidence

- Not feeling 'good enough'.
- Having to tackle imposter syndrome – struggling to believe that they deserve the role they are in.
- Not knowing who to go to if they needed to ask for help.

Low confidence can impact people's willingness to apply for, accept, and aim to progress within roles.

A lack of clarity on who can provide support can leave people struggling with issues for much longer than needed.

Challenging behaviour from colleagues

- Being perceived as difficult or even threatening by non-LGBTQ+ staff.
- Their appearance being viewed as too visibly LGBTQ+, or not professional enough.
- Colleagues being unwilling to learn about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences.
- Colleagues not acknowledging that LGBTQ+ people face specific challenges at work and in the wider world.
- Not being seen as a valid member of the workplace community.
- Being taken less seriously because of their age.
- Their performance being judged differently because of their LGBTQ+ identity -- for example, being treated more harshly if they made a mistake.

By far the biggest concern for early career LGBTQ+ people was their colleagues' behaviour.

Experiencing challenging behaviour like this can lead LGBTQ+ people to hide parts of their identity or risk conflict with colleagues – both of which would have a negative impact on their lives inside and outside work.

HOW EARLY CAREER LGBTQ+ PEOPLE SUGGESTED EMPLOYERS COULD SUPPORT THEM

In the same focus group, we asked participants from the Stonewall LGBTQ+ Young Leaders' programme what they would like to see from employers to make their workplace more inclusive for early career LGBTQ+ people.

SUGGESTED CHANGE	EXAMPLES
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share pronouns. While sharing pronouns should always be optional, it can be a great way for everyone to demonstrate that they understand their importance, making it easier for LGBTQ+ people to be open about their identities. Use inclusive language when addressing a group of people. This can be as simple as saying 'everyone' rather than 'ladies and gentlemen'. If you make a mistake with someone's pronouns or another aspect of their identity, do your best to apologise, acknowledge your mistake and understand the impact it may have had.
Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commit to specific, tangible actions that can improve inclusion. For example, rather than saying 'I want to make LGBTQ+ people feel more welcome', you might say 'I'm going to introduce my pronouns at the start of each meeting'. Avoid making assumptions about LGBTQ+ people and their experiences. Never require people to disclose their identity, even when they're choosing to join a network group or helping with inclusion events. Think broadly about reasonable adjustments. Since many LGBTQ+ people have intersecting identities, they may need adjustments related to a disability, faith, culture or caring responsibilities. Release official statements as an organisation about LGBTQ+ issues and reaffirm your commitment to inclusion. Support your network groups and celebrate their contribution to your organisation. Don't be afraid to get it wrong! Continually trying is the most important thing.

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- Policies**
- Have inclusive policies, for example ensure that there are gender neutral options in your uniform policy
 - Introduce an allyship pledge, which people can sign up to after training so that staff across the organisation can demonstrate their commitment to inclusion e.g. *I will read two books by LGBTQ+ authors this year*
 - Have clear reporting mechanisms so that LGBTQ+ colleagues know what to do if they experience anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination or harassment.
 - Recognise that these measures will benefit everyone. When an organisation commits to inclusion, it sends a clear message that abuse and discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated.

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- Learning**
- Educate colleagues about LGBTQ+ experiences, multiple marginalisation and the barriers that LGBTQ+ people face.
 - Understand that not everyone wants to be an identity expert. Consult and listen to LGBTQ+ people, but do not expect all LGBTQ+ people to educate your teams.
 - When consulting with staff on LGBTQ+ issues, set out specific time for this work to be done rather than it being additional to regular workload.

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- Progression**
- Invest in early career LGBTQ+ people and give them opportunities, such as being paired with an LGBTQ+ mentor.
 - Create a culture where support is offered proactively rather than only when people ask.

GOOD PRACTICE AND CASE STUDIES

Based on the themes we heard from participants at the LGBTQ+ Young Leaders Programme, we've drawn together good practice suggestions and case studies in three key areas.

Working specifically on recruitment, onboarding and development can have a big impact on the experience of early career LGBTQ+ staff.

While not all the following suggestions will work in every context, we've gathered a broad range of ideas to help you select the steps that will make tangible change in your workplace.

RECRUITMENT

Our work with early career LGBTQ+ people showed that their anxieties about entering the workplace began early. Issues such as low confidence and worries about whether they could be out at work were barriers to even applying for roles. By improving your recruitment practices, you can show potential employees that they will be welcomed and supported as their full selves while at work.

Partnering with educational institutions

Doing outreach work with local schools, colleges and universities, including any LGBTQ+ networks they have. By running activities with young people, you can engage them in your sector, develop their skills, and give them an insight into work.

Encourage LGBTQ+ employees to attend events at their universities, so they to give your organisation greater visibility with early career LGBTQ+ people. Partner with local educational institutions to offer site visits to give students real-world experience of possible jobs. This will help them become familiar with the world of work and reduce any worries about entering work.

Taking part in recruitment events

Events, expos and seminars across the UK focus on recruiting diverse workforces – some are even specific to LGBTQ+ jobseekers. At these events, talk about the work you're doing to improve LGBTQ+ inclusion in your workplace.

Attend university recruitment fairs. Have representatives advertise your LGBTQ+ network and inclusion work as part of your recruitment drive.

Improving your recruitment information

Add an inclusion statement to application pages. Outline a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination – including on the basis of sexual orientation, gender reassignment, gender identity and expression.

See: Leigh Day Solicitors inclusion statement on the next page (p12).

Add links to your LGBTQ+ inclusion work and network groups clearly on your website.

Share employee stories and report on your inclusion events on social media, so that potential applicants can learn more about what it's like to be LGBTQ+ in your workplace.

Do a spot check – if a potential employee searched LGBTQ+ on your website would they find information about your inclusion work and employee network group?

Share job adverts on LGBTQ-specific job boards, such as [Proud Employers](#). This allows your organisation to demonstrate its commitment to hiring and nurturing LGBTQ+ talent.

Ensure that the monitoring form provided to applicants represents good practice in asking about LGBTQ+ inclusion to demonstrate to potential applicants that diversity and inclusion is taken seriously.

EXAMPLE: Leigh Day Solicitors inclusion statement

Diversity & inclusion at Leigh Day

Leigh Day is committed to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion. We value the diversity of our colleagues, our clients and the third parties with whom we work. We seek to create an environment where everyone feels included and valued for their unique characteristics, skills and abilities and supported in their needs and responsibilities.

Leigh Day does not tolerate discrimination, bullying or harassment on grounds of sex, age, race, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, gender reassignment, sex characteristics, religion or belief.

We have policies in place to support our commitment to equality and diversity and ensure that it is realised on a day to day basis. We also monitor the way that we employ and manage our staff and the way that we interact with clients, third parties and suppliers to ensure that our dealings are consistent with our principles.

LGBT+

The firm has an LGBT+ Network which is driven by a committee of staff members. Some of the network's activities include organising seminars and events of LGBT+ interest, providing a peer support network for LGBT+ staff and ensuring the firm's policies and practices support LGBT+ staff.

Leigh Day is also a Stonewall Diversity Champion and submits each year to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.

RISE

Leigh Day's Race, Intersectionality, and Structural Equality Committee is led by a committee of staff from across the firm. It focuses on improving recruitment and progression of all BAME staff, encouraging diversity within the firm's networks, educating and reflecting on the wider race debate and increasing accessibility to the legal profession.

Web page: www.leighday.co.uk/diversity-inclusion-at-leigh-day/

Inclusion for apprentices and those on graduate schemes

Consider how and where you advertise your scheme. For example, advertising on LGBTQ+ job boards or working with organisations that support apprentices from specific marginalised communities.

Partner with careers teams at local educational authorities such as schools, colleges and universities so that potential candidates can learn more about your organisation and what an apprenticeship or graduate scheme role might involve.

Train staff responsible for graduate schemes and apprenticeships in LGBTQ+ inclusion to help them. This will help your organisation to provide an inclusive environment for early career LGBTQ+ people from the outset.

Inclusive Interview Processes

When it comes to graduate schemes and early career roles, it's vital that the interview helps candidates feel like they'd fit in at your organisation and that they'd have real chances to progress. Interviews are a valuable opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to welcoming and upskilling early career LGBTQ+ candidates.

Share as much information as you can in advance, for example about the interview location, the interview process, dress code and the interviewers. For early career LGBTQ+ people, this may be their first interview experience – preparing them well will allow them to properly demonstrate the skills they could bring to your organisation.

Share your pronouns at the start of the interview. This demonstrates your awareness of LGBTQ+ inclusion and gives the interviewee an opportunity to share their pronouns too. Remember: sharing pronouns should be optional.

Make sure that interview staff are aware of your LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, diversity and inclusion work and LGBTQ+ network group and can discuss these with candidates if requested.

To learn more about how Stonewall can support you to recruit early career LGBTQ+ people, email us at prospect@stonewall.org.uk.

ONBOARDING

Early career LGBTQ+ people can not only struggle to find work and apprenticeships that make the most of their skills and experience, they can also experience challenges once in work that make it difficult to remain in role. They might feel unable to be themselves at work or find that the work environment isn't inclusive.

Having a thorough onboarding process can transform an employee's first weeks and months at work and help with employee retention

You might consider:

Ahead of joining you might consider sharing information on your employee networks, including the LGBTQ+ network, with new staff. This will demonstrate your commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion, which can reduce anxiety around a new role.

Having a buddy system run by the LGBTQ+ network can help new starters who join the network start to connect with other people in the organisation.

Ensuring that anti-discrimination policies are clearly promoted in welcome information and on your intranet, so your new starter knows that you're committed to maintaining an inclusive workplace.

CASE STUDY: Linklaters development programme

This multi-firm initiative was led by Patrick McCann of Linklaters (Director of Learning – Legal Operations, Linklaters and Chair of the CLLS TC). It brought together an LGBTQ+ faculty consisting of Addleshaw Goddard (Richard Fisk), BCLP (Daisy Reeves), Herbert Smith Freehills (Neil Mitchell), Norton Rose Fulbright (Colin Shaw) and Travers Smith (Chris Edwards), along with LGBTQ+ DEI experts Alicia Millar and Liz Ward.

The LGBTQ+ Lawyers' Programme (The LLP) was the first ever international, cross-sector collaborative development programme for LGBTQ+ lawyers. The LLP was designed to empower LGBTQ+ lawyers in their professional and personal development. It included pre-work, in-person learning days supplemented with a networking dinner attended by inspirational LGBTQ+ legal leaders, an action plan and post-course coaching to help delegates integrate the programme's lessons into their careers.

The course was structured around key pillars designed to address different aspects of development.

They included:

- Personal identity and strengths.
- Client engagement and development from an LGBTQ+ perspective.
- The landscape for LGBTQ+ lawyers. How LGBTQ+ lawyers can help shape the future of legal practice. What it means to be an LGBTQ+ leader in the legal profession. Building and maintaining professional relationships.
- Personal and professional growth, and how to succeed as an LGBTQ+ lawyer.

Learning was varied, with a mix of trainer-led sessions, panel discussions, expert presentations, group activities and peer review. The programme was highly successful. It increased skills and confidence in participants, helped establish new LGBTQIA+ networks within firms and raised £31,500 for LGBTQIA+ charities.

Feedback from delegates was incredibly positive, and included the following two testimonials:

"This experience has truly been transformative, equipping me with both the practical leadership skills and the confidence to fully embrace my identity in the workplace."

"Making the leap from Senior Associate to Partner is not easy for anyone. For those who are also LGBTQ+ it can seem all the more daunting. Led by an amazing group of successful LGBTQ+ role models in law, the course provided me with a much needed boost of confidence and energy, and focused my mind on next steps."

DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

Our work with early career LGBTQ+ people showed that they faced challenges that made it harder for them to access development opportunities and to progress at work. By focusing on supporting development, you can improve your employees' workplace experiences and help retain them as staff.

To support development and retention, you could:

Set up or join LGBTQ-specific talent development programmes

These programmes can:

Demonstrate that you are invested in LGBTQ+ people's career development, which can help you retain staff. Help early career LGBTQ+ people develop a network of peers who can provide mutual support. Support early career LGBTQ+ people to recognise the skills and experiences they already have and boost their confidence at work.

Encourage members to apply for more senior roles or take leadership positions in LGBTQ+ network groups.

Use monitoring data to understand progression in your organisation

Monitoring data is a huge source of knowledge for your organisation and can help you to identify areas of change or new initiatives that can support early career LGBTQ+ people. Making data-driven decisions can help your organisation take effective action.

Find out how many LGBTQ+ staff you have, how long they stay, and whether they progress through the company. This can help you to identify low retention rates and understand how you might change this.

Analyse the data by age to understand if early career LGBTQ+ people face particular challenges in your workplace.

Support progression

Promote development opportunities within and outside the workplace through your network group that could help early career LGBTQ+ people build skills and confidence, for example, events for LGBTQ+ aspiring leaders.

Provide ongoing training for early career LGBTQ+ people. Consult with your network to determine areas that need additional development.

Find ways to profile LGBTQ+ leaders in your organisation and sector which could include inviting them to speak at events demonstrating to early career LGBTQ+ people that it is possible to progress here.

Train line managers

Ensure all line managers – including those managing apprentices – have LGBTQ+ inclusion training so they are able to support direct reports. Early career LGBTQ+ people shared their concerns about needing to educate others on their identities. Providing training as part of your package of training for all line managers can reduce this risk.

Training can equip line managers to support their direct reports if they experience harassment or discrimination at work. If early career employees feel supported throughout this process, it can lessen the impact of the experience and help with retention.

For early career LGBTQ+ people, being able to trust that your line manager is an ally who understands your experiences can create more positive workplace experiences.

Recognise inclusion work

Create formal opportunities to recognise the work staff are doing for LGBTQ+ inclusion, for example during appraisals. Recognising the work that early career employees do in inclusion can help to build their confidence, formally recognise the skills they've gained through this work, and encourage them to continue supporting with inclusion.

Officially recognise and reward staff who help to organise events, speak publicly and raise awareness of your organisation's LGBTQ+ inclusion efforts. This can be a fantastic way to raise the profile and confidence of your early career LGBTQ+ staff and provide them with development opportunities such as public speaking.

Provide and support networking opportunities

Promote the LGBTQ+ network in your workplace. If your new starter is out, make sure they're aware of the network and encourage them to join.

Run LGBTQ+ specific networking events where early career LGBTQ+ people have the opportunity to meet and talk with other LGBTQ+ people in your organisation or in the wider industry.

Join or consider offering mentoring programmes that can help LGBTQ+ people make connections with others in the industry who can support them to develop their careers.

Offer a range of connection opportunities through the network so that those joining your organisation have different opportunities to meet others e.g. at informal coffees, events or in more formal network group meetings.

Visibly champion LGBTQ+ inclusion and employees

Share regular messages of support to help educate staff on LGBTQ+ topics and awareness days. Remember to champion the voices of early career LGBTQ+ employees and highlight their work.

Share LGBTQ+ employees' career stories to demonstrate that LGBTQ+ staff are valued in the organisation and can progress. This will show early career LGBTQ+ employees that they can succeed at your organisation.

CASE STUDY: Allen & Overy Youth Mentoring Event

Allen & Overy (A&O) partnered with another Belfast-based organisation, in collaboration with The Rainbow Project, to develop a comprehensive mentoring programme. This initiative is part of their broader commitment to diversity and inclusion, providing a structured environment where early career LGBTQ+ people can gain confidence, navigate their academic and professional journeys, and build valuable networks. Their December 2023 LGBTQ+ Youth Mentoring Event included five key components:

1. Building confidence

This session provided a safe and supportive space for LGBTQ+ individuals to enhance their confidence. Participants shared experiences, practiced affirmations, and learned practical strategies to tackle societal pressures. Discussions and role-play helped delegates navigate real-life challenges.

2. Panel – ‘Navigating your academic and professional journey’

Two A&O panellists, alongside three panellists from partner organisations, provided practical insights for success in academia and the job market. They discussed application strategies, interview techniques, and effective networking. Interactive activities and real-world examples enriched the session, equipping attendees with a comprehensive guide to ongoing development.

3. Keynote speech

Justin Farrance, a DE&I Ambassador at Allen & Overy, gave an inspiring and motivational speech. He emphasised personal empowerment, the importance of diversity and inclusion, and setting future aspirations. He also provided practical strategies for overcoming discrimination and bias, including self-affirmation, support and allyship,

utilising company resources, strong professional networks, continuous learning, reporting discrimination, and advocating for inclusive policies.

4. Speed networking

This session allowed participants to network with professionals from A&O, The Rainbow Project, and our partner organisation. This session fostered quick connections and learning – attendees could also chat at stalls to gain in-depth information about these organisations, their missions, and opportunities.

5. Negotiation

Developing strong negotiation skills can have long-term benefits for participants’ careers. Effective negotiation is key to securing better job offers, promotions, and project opportunities. By mastering these skills early on, LGBTQ+ individuals can position themselves for greater success and advancement in their professional lives.

This practical activity was designed to mimic real-world scenarios in a controlled environment. Engaging in the exercise with peers also allowed participants to learn from each other and build a sense of community.

The LGBTQ+ Youth Mentoring Event exemplifies how structured mentoring programmes can significantly impact the development of early career LGBTQ+ talent. Participants left with a clearer understanding of how to approach their careers, build networks, and advocate for themselves in various settings.

THANK YOU

We hope you found this resource useful and that it’s given you practical advice around making your own workplace more inclusive.

Remember that huge changes can’t happen straightaway. It’s important to make time to reflect on your progress and celebrate your successes to help sustain momentum in your inclusion work, which will always be an ongoing process. If you’d like any support to put new initiatives in place in your workplace, please do reach out to Stonewall on prospect@stonewall.org.uk.

This resource forms part of a larger ‘Nurturing LGBTQ+ Talent’ project run by Stonewall and generously funded by The UPS Foundation.