

Survey to elicit attitudes towards Sexual Orientation

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November 2010

As long as you show hate,
As much remains with you,
As that you give to others.
As long as you make people fear,
The biggest fear,
Will live within yourself.
As much as you force love to hide,
Be buried, lost or broken,
There will be a time for it to live and breathe.
For we will always be here in the end,
As long as you have hate to give,
And we have only love.

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Abstract

A Survey was designed to elicit attitudes towards sexual orientation as part of a project on Sexual Orientation and Equality with the Further Education Arena, conducted in partnership with Telford Primary Care NHS Trust, local Police, Telford & Wrekin Council and Telford Race, Equality and Diversity Partnership. The Survey was done over a six month period. Following a pilot study in spring 2010, minor but important changes to the wording of the questionnaire were made on the advice of Phil Barnett, Critical Partner.

These included adding “no” as an optional response to the question, “would a LGBT student group be a good idea?” and strengthening the definitions of sexual orientation in question 3b.

317 students completed the surveys at the end of workshops on equality by Cathy Parker. Attitudes towards sexual orientation were drawn from within a survey divided into four sections: Student Information, Equal Opportunities Monitoring, Equality and Diversity and the College Community.

Workshops were held at the invitation of tutors in response to publicity by Cathy.

Of 317 respondents, 12 identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual. These students were from all categories. 16 students preferred not to say or did not answer. Results revealed a slight majority of students were in favour of a LGBT student group whilst a significant number 146 said no or did not answer.

Results

SECTION 1: STUDENT INFORMATION

1a **Gender**

Male	Female	Total No. of Respondents
186	131	317

1b **Course Type**

Full Time	Part Time	Did not answer
294	19	4

1c **Your Age Range**

16 - 19	20 – 25	26 – 35	35 +	Did not answer
293	15	0	3	6

1d **Do you have part-time work?**

Yes	No	Did not answer
81	220	16

1e **Are you a Carer looking after a family member?**

Yes	No	Did not answer
17	286	14

SECTION 2: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING

ETHNICITY

Asian/British – Bangladeshi	
Asian/British – Indian	7
Asian/British – Pakistani	11
Asian/British – Other	
Black/British – African	11
Black/British – Caribbean	3
Black/British – Other	
Chinese	1
Mixed White/Asian	
Mixed White/Black African	2
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	5
Mixed – Other	
White – British	266
White – Irish	
White – Other	5
Any Other	3
Not known/Not provided	3

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

To help us provide any additional support, please tick the appropriate box.

(Please note students ticked as many boxes as applied)

Do you have?

Difficulty with reading	19
Difficulty with writing	13
Difficulty with hearing	5
Medical condition	2
Mobility problems	1
Physical problems	2
Sight difficulty	7
Speech difficulty	2
Statement of Education	3
Other Medical conditions	1
Emotional/behavioural difficulties	3
Mental ill health	3
Temp disability after illness	0
Profound/complex difficulties	0
Multiple disabilities	1
Other	0
No disability	110
Not known/Not provided	114

Moderate Learning difficulty	5
Severe learning difficulty	0
Dyslexia	10
Dyscalculia	2
Other learning difficulties	2
Multiple learning difficulties	1
Other	3
No learning difficulty	99
Not known/not provided	172
Aspersers	3

SECTION 3: – EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

3a. Do you think learning about other cultures help us to get along as a College Community?

Yes	No	Did not answer
262	52	3

3b As a college we strive to cater for all learners' individual needs. By learning more about the characteristics of the College's students we can enrich our diverse community. The following question is confidential and is about your personal relationships and anonymous as is the full survey.

Are the people you fancy?

3b.1	The opposite sex to you (straight/heterosexual)	289
3b.2	The same sex as you (lesbian or gay/homosexual)	4
3b.3	Sometimes the same sex and sometimes the opposite sex to you (bisexual)	7
3b.4	Prefer not to say	8
3b.5	Please tick if you consider yourself to be transsexual	1
3b.6	DID NOT ANSWER	8

Breakdown of Gay Respondents Sexuality (Respondents to 3b.2)

Homosexual	Lesbian
2	2

If you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or a transgender student, have you experienced bullying or discrimination?

Yes	No	Did not answer
8	2	2

3c Do you think a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual (LGBT) student group at College would be a good idea?

Yes	No	Did not answer
171	104	42

Please say why you think this is?

- It would be helpful to them.
- So that if anyone is interested they can talk about it to other people that will listen.
- People can get together and feel safer and better as they won't be nervous about what others will say.
- Good for those who need it and would use it.
- Because people can come to college and find friends to socialise and talk to about what they like.
- Because it shows that College cares about the students.
- It will help people be an individual.
- Gives people a chance to express themselves.
- It can help people like that.
- Can meet other Gay/Lesbian/bisexual people and talk to them.
- Will help express their feelings.
- It lets people express their emotions and feelings
- Encourage diversity
- So that people know they are not alone.
- Get along better
- Because it will help those who are gay, bisexual or transsexual gain more confidence in themselves.
- It would allow LGBT students to meet people who are of the same sexual orientation so they feel that they are not alone.
- Because it helps people come to express their feelings in an environment they feel comfortable in.
- Gives people a place to talk to others and discuss problems they may face.
- So they feel they belong.
- Good for gay community.
- So people can feel more comfortable.
- It would be good because you get to communicate with others who know your feelings.
- Because they get to communicate with other people.
- Provides support, increases confidence and comfort.
- No one should be judged.
- Yes because people have the chance to share their feelings and no because some people may feel they would get bullied by going.
- Because it would help people out that there are more than just them in the world.
- To help people understand and learn to accept for whom they are.

- Because everybody is equal and they should all be treated the same, no special group.
- Get bullied.
- It will tell us a lot of things about other people that are gays and lesbians.
- Helps people understand more.
- Get to know feelings about each others experiences.
- Someone to talk to about our sexuality.
- Helps people to understand that there are other people like them.
- Helps others come to terms with it.
- So people can have their say in a secure environment.
- Allows people to express their feelings and listen to others who have problems.
- Because it would bring them together, they wouldn't feel left out.
- So people can get along and not get bullied.
- So people can be more confident with their sexuality.
- More people would feel confident about their sexuality with more support.
- It would be a good idea because more people will be open with their sexuality.
- Meet people that are the same and feel the same. Also, easier to talk to them if they understand.
- More people would feel confident about being themselves and they may not feel they would have to hide it.
- Yes people like to study in college if there is no problem.
- Because people can meet new people.
- They can meet together.
- Help Equality.
- Because it is what they are.
- Help people out that are LGBT.
- Something to do.
- Because it would help them within college.
- So people can share their thoughts.
- Because it would bring all the LGBT together and they would feel more comfortable knowing it's not just them.
- Helps people to get along with everyone.
- Give people a chance to say how they feel.
- It would help them and support them.
- Because they don't feel they have to hide their sexuality.
- They could feel supported.
- Because it will make them feel better in ways being able to talk about it.
- Because gay people can go there to find support if they need it and it gives them something to do and opportunities to meet like-minded people.
- So that everyone can learn to stop judging each other.

Respondents who answered no provided the following reasons:

- Because that's singling them out from the rest.
- Cause bullying.
- Because people might see them and pick them out at a later date.
- Because most people who are gay, bisexual etc are afraid to admit it.
- Because people wouldn't take notice.
- Because it won't stop bullying.
- Because people might consider they have to avoid others because of their sexuality.
- It would put the spotlight on different people.
- They could make friends with people.

SECTION 4 – EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

4a The College will not tolerate racism, homophobia, sexism or harassment or bullying of any kind.

Whilst at College have you seen/heard any of the following?

	Yes	No	Did not answer
Racist comments	105	186	26
Sexist comments	80	204	33
Someone being bullied/harassed	80	212	25

If you answered 'yes', please contact Student Services

Was this incident:

	Yes	No	Did not answer
Between Students	98	59	160
Between staff and students	23	146	148

SECTION 5: THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

5a The College staff are helpful and friendly

Yes	No	Don't know	Did not answer
279	7	21	10

5b I would recommend any course to a friend

Yes	No	Don't know	Did not answer
257	17	29	14

5c I would recommend the College to a friend

Yes	No	Don't know	Did not answer
262	19	21	15

5d All students are treated equally and fairly

Yes	No	Don't know	Did not answer
199	37	63	18

5e I feel the College is a safe place to be

Yes	No	Don't know	Did not answer
229	35	30	23

What else do you think we could do to make the College campus safer for you? Please comment:

- Nothing College is good.
- Put up sharp wire.
- More security guards.
- More security.
- Nothing as I feel safe as I am.
- Provide free driving lessons so students can safely drive to College.
- No need for improvement.
- More CCTV.
- Make more smoking areas.
- Hidden cameras at entrances.
- College is good as it is.
- Finger printer to get in.
- Have more staff about.
- Nothing.
- No.
- Don't know.
- They have reached their peak.

Is there anything else Telford College could do to promote a more tolerant atmosphere?

- No, everything is ok and good.
- No.
- Thank you.
- Educate students' about this sort of thing in advance.
- Colourful walls
- More heating (always cold)
- I don't feel there is an atmosphere
- Nothing really

- No.
- No.
- Don't know.

1 student answered N/A to both.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

In relation to questions on Sexual Orientation

- 91.2% Identified themselves as straight or heterosexual
- 1.3% Identified themselves as gay or lesbian
- 2.2% Identified themselves as bisexual
- 0.3% Identified themselves as transsexual
- 2.5% Did not answer
- 2.5% Preferred not to say
- 53.9% Thought an LGBT student group a good idea
- 32.8% Did not think an LGBT student group a good idea
- 13.2% Did not answer

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Introduction

In 21st Century Britain, positive commitment to diversity and equality is enshrined as a governing principle of our democratic practice through legislation, social policy and continuing active campaigning.

But if we stepped back in time over five decades very different pictures would emerge and there is a value in taking some time to remind ourselves of the very different experiences of minorities and how Britain began to give recognition and respect to specific groups of people, to begin the reverse of institutionalised prejudice and disadvantage and to ensure their basic rights. It remains a process that is evolving, although much has been accomplished.

Prior to the raft of anti-discriminatory law in the middle 60's, many people in Britain faced overt and indirect discrimination on the basis of their ethnic origin, gender, age, disability and sexual orientation.

People in same sex relationships faced hostility and ostracism if their sexual orientation became known. Even more than this, practising their sexuality was against the law for homosexuals and could result in custodial sentence.

To be openly gay could make it difficult for people to be accepted into certain professions such as health, education, the military and any work with a public profile.

In 1967 Liberal MP David Steel introduced and secured a bill to legalise homosexuality in England and Wales.

However, there is always a space between legislation and the internalisation of anti-discriminatory ideas on a wider public and private basis.

In the 70s there were very few openly gay, lesbian and bisexual people in public life and positions of influence and power.

Even in the 80s, a decade synonymous with a rising LGBT profile in politics, campaigning, cultural and social life, a British Social Attitudes Survey showed that two thirds of people thought homosexuality was 'always or mostly wrong' (1987); in under 20 years only a third would claim this belief (Ward and Carvel 2008).

In the new millenium "The Independent" newspaper now publishes a "Pink List" of influential LGB people across the spectrum of public life – politicians, business, sports and culture.

Legislation has been accompanied by a shift in attitudes and perceptions.

Stonewall (2006) the campaigning organisation founded in California in 1969 in direct resistance to police raids, looked at British attitudes towards lesbian and gay people and their study revealed majority support for action against discrimination and harassment of people because of their sexual orientation.

Furthermore, 87% of those surveyed would feel comfortable or neutral with a gay MP representing them, 87% would feel comfortable or neutral if their boss in a new job was gay and 78% would feel comfortable or neutral if their GP was gay.

73% would feel comfortable or neutral if their child's teacher was gay.

(N.B. “comfortable” includes very comfortable, comfortable and neutral.)

According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) a dramatic change in perceptions has occurred in relation to LGB people and they highlight the Section 28 legislation of 20 yrs ago which they say “sought to vilify same sex relationships and the Civil Partnership Act of 2004 which gave legal recognition to those same relationships” (1).

As tolerance and acceptance of diversity has risen, people in Britain are less tolerant of discrimination. Social norms and practices have been through a process of shift, underpinned and influenced by state legislation,

Significant legislation for LGBT people has been:

- 1967 - The Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexual acts in private between 2 men, both of whom had to be 21 at least.
- 1998 - Human Rights Act enshrined basic rights in British Law.
- 2002 - Allowed same sex couples to make a joint application to adopt
- 2003 - Employment Equality Regulation – outlawed workplace discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion or beliefs.
- 2004 - Civil Partnership 2004 – gave legal recognition to same sex relationships
- 2004 - Gender Recognition Act 2004 – provided transgender people with a means to gain legal recognition in their acquired gender.
- 2007 - Equality Act Sexual Orientation Regulations outlawed discrimination on basis of sexual orientation in provision of goods and services.

Whilst this legislation represents an immense step forward, and policy units and research organisations yield much that is positive and encouraging in their attitudinal surveys, there is still a need to be vigilant against intolerance and discrimination.

A 2009 study into prejudice, carried out by the Occupational Psychology Consultancy firm Shire Professional found homophobic attitudes more common than racism.

60 people were tested on attitudes to equality and diversity – age, ethnic origin, gender, religion, disability and sexual orientation.

This comparatively small study revealed the main prejudice was towards sexual orientation, with 7% of participants 'strongly anti-gay', 3% 'anti-lesbian'.

35% had anti-gay predilection and 41% some anti-lesbian prejudice. Lead researcher Dr. Pete Jones commented that without detracting from the serious prejudice still faced by ethnic minorities, "the results of our study suggest that being gay or lesbian could be the "new black" when it comes to being a victim of prejudice". (2)

Forty years ago LGB people were forced to live an invisible personal life, to suppress their relationships and sexual orientation in the face of huge legal and social pressures and censure.

Perhaps the fact that LGBTs are now a visible minority is testament to the advances that have been made and to the growing acceptance of diversity. But it should also be borne in mind that being visible and 'coming out' remains a challenge for individuals in their families, communities, colleges and workplaces.

As Trevor Phillips wrote:

“no individual can be truly free to realise their potential or to exercise their inalienable human rights as long as they are imprisoned by the invisible, many stranded web of prejudice, inertia and unfairness that holds so many back”. (3)

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Discussion

317 students participated in this survey which was conducted at the end of workshops on equality by Cathy Parker.

The Workshops were given in response to requests from tutors following a cross-college promotion.

Overwhelmingly students were on full-time courses and aged between 16-19. They were drawn from a range of ethnicities and additional support needs. There were more males than female respondents, partly because workshops were given in traditionally male courses in the latter part of the project.

Once the results had been collated they were analysed for the purposes of this report and the project work undertaken will hopefully form a basis for future workshops and research.

82.6% responded positively to question 3a in the Equality & Diversity section, "Do you think learning about other cultures helps us to get along as a College Community"? 16.4% answered "no".

It would have been fascinating if there had been a space provided for students to elaborate on their responses, especially with regard to the negative ones, and this could usefully form an amendment to any future research. Following the pilot study, "no" had been added as an alternative response to 3c "Do you think a LGBT student group at College would be a good idea? And this had revealed some interesting and thought provoking reasons from both streams of thought.

Further definition was added to the categories in question 3b about respondent's sexual orientation on advice from the critical partner.

Students were reassured that this information would be treated confidentially.

91.2% identified themselves as attracted to the opposite sex (straight/heterosexual relationships)

1.3% as the same sex as you (lesbian or gay/homosexual) 2.2 % sometimes the same sex and sometimes the opposite sex (bisexual and 1 (0.3%) as transsexual. 8 students (2.5%) did not answer and 2.5% preferred not to say.

The 8 people who did not answer this question and the 8 who preferred not to say, answered other sections of the questionnaire, suggesting this may have been a definite choice not to respond or disclose.

These two sets of responses might suggest there are still implications for disclosure of sexual orientation. It could be that some students were anxious unsure or reluctant about defining their sexuality so concretely or that they had a doubt, no matter how small, about the confidential nature of the survey. Issues of seating and the proximity of other students might have been a factor.

Evidence gathered by Mitchell et al., (2009) found that, in work place questionnaires, people answering questions about their sexual orientation needed to feel safe and protected against discrimination; indeed, monitoring of orientation is the exception rather than the norm, according to Aspinall and Mitton (2008) and "rarely asked relative to other equality strands such as gender, ethnic group/origin or disability" (4)

Where job applications include sexual orientation in their equal opportunities monitoring, a quarter of gay men and lesbians and a third of bisexuals would not answer the question. (Ellison and Gunstone 2009).

It is also possible that some students felt this was a very personal question of individual choice, following on from the more abstract question about learning about other cultures and that going from the abstract to a deeper internal issue of sexual identity was too personal for some.

Males were 3:1 more likely not to answer the next question “Do you think a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transsexual (LGBT) student group at College would be a good idea”?

As many male students were surveyed at the beginning of the academic year, it may be that the strong Community College talks impacted here.

Classes receive talks about the strong Respect Policy and the Citizenship Code and separate workshops on bullying and harassment and students may have been slightly more guarded about giving what they thought would be an “unacceptable” response.

Overall, there was slight majority support for the LGBT student group although this question drew a more even spread of responses than any other, with 53.9% answering “yes”, 32.8% “no” and 13.2% not answering.

In the pilot study, “yes” was the only answer to this question and it wasn’t until the full study commenced that “no” was added as an optional response.

If this hadn’t been added, it would have been a far less interesting and revealing survey.

Students were invited to comment why they responded as they did, and these responses are included in the results section in the students' original words.

Comments by those who thought the LGBT student group would be a good idea broadly fell into four categories: safety, self-expression, equality and isolation, although it is not implied these comments are in mutually exclusive categories.

Many students felt that such a group would raise confidence and that people would feel more comfortable "being themselves" and "not being nervous about what others say". They "wouldn't have to hide what or who they are" and find "safety in numbers". They would be able to "have their say in a secure environment".

It was also felt that it would enable people to express themselves, giving them space to be "an individual" and to "openly express their emotions and feelings".

Others thought a group would "show the College cares", "help and equality" and "encourage diversity", for "no one should be judged".

Students thought the group could also function as a means to reduce isolation, bringing people together so "they wouldn't feel left out" and giving them opportunities to socialise and "meet like-minded people" and help them understand there are "others like them" so that they "could feel they don't have to hide their sexuality".

Students who didn't think the LGBT group as a good idea gave less reasons for their answer, but comments such as "won't stop bullying", "cause bullying",

“draws attention to them”, “puts spotlight on them” indicates they felt such a group could have a negative impact on those attending it; so maybe some of these responses were not informed by anti-gay feeling but pessimism about human nature and repercussions; one student did not think the group would be an idea “because it’s singling them out”.

At every point in history when major advances in equality and justice have occurred, there has at some turn been a tension between raising the profile of the prejudice & disadvantage minority groups endure and the perceived need to work in less overt ways, so as not to antagonise the majority.

The provision of groups and other support services is in itself a valuable thing to do, not just because it is responding to the needs of a minority but because it should be a natural service as part of an inclusive college commitment.

In Section 4 “Equal Opportunities”, students were asked if they had seen/heard comments of a racist, homophobic (anti-gay), sexist nature and if they had seen someone being bullied/harassed.

32% had heard racist comments although a majority, 58.7%, hadn’t.

25.2% had heard homophobic comments although a clear majority 64.4% hadn’t.

40% said they had heard sexist comments, 58.5% hadn’t.

25.2% had seen or witnessed someone being bullied or harassed although the majority 66.7% had not.

10% of all respondents ticked all boxes for having heard racist, homophobic and sexist comments but not for someone being bullied or harassed.

Could this possibly infer that these comments weren't seen as bullying or harassment? It would be helpful to explore this more in the future, maybe context would be helpful e.g. were these comments overheard, or made to a specific individual; were they made in the presence of an individual from an ethnic minority or who is gay (or believed to be gay) or to a specific gender; were these comments made in private conversation?

2% of respondents who ticked all boxes but said they had not witnessed bullying or harassment defined the comments as made in "jest" or "just jokes". Did some of the other students think the comments were "banter" or "jest" as well?

Do people always understand how comments can be received and can hurt others?

Males were twice as likely as females to tick all the boxes for not having heard comments or witnessed any bullying.

Students male and female, who did this tended to be positive in all responses 5a – 5e on the College Community.

It opens debate as to whether more examples of what constitutes racist, homophobic or sexist comments would be beneficial in a more depth study, maybe through situational vignettes.

Would respondents also recognise racism, homophobia sexism in themselves?

85% of those who ticked all boxes for not having heard any comments or seen any bullying were from the ethnic White British group and identified themselves as straight.

As part of the majority culture would they be less sensitive to or less aware of the sometimes almost imperceptible undertones in what is said or implied. Is an internalised sense of being white, British and heterosexual possibly influencing responses here?

In the section on the College Community, students overwhelmingly thought the staff helpful and friendly (88%).

81% would recommend their course to a friend and 82% would recommend the College.

50.2% thought all students are treated equally and fairly (question 5d) although a higher ratio of students answered no (11.7%) and don't know (19.9%) than any other corresponding responses to questions in this section. 5.8% did not answer.

Those who had seen or heard racist comments were more likely to answer "no" or "don't know" to this question than any other.

72.2% thought the College as a safe place to be; 11% said "no", 9.5% didn't know and 7.3% didn't answer.

When students didn't answer or left out a response to any of the questions in Section 5, their responses were checked in other categories to see if there was a pattern i.e. level of understanding, difficulty reading etc.

After checking, it was thought likely that the non responses were deliberate choices rather than being misunderstandings, based on their whole responses to the survey.

Students who ticked "yes" in all 4 boxes in Section 4 ("have you heard racist, homophobic, sexist comments and have you heard someone being bullied and harassed") were more likely to feel the College was not safe and more likely not to affirm all students were treated fairly.

Those who had not witnessed or heard any comments or bullying were 3 times more likely to respond positively across all questions 5a – 5e in the College Community Section.

The transsexual ticked all boxes positively, feeling College was safe and having not experienced any bullying (it was not disclosed if Trans-sexuality was manifested publicly or privately).

CONCLUSION

Once results had been collated and analysed, there was majority support for a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender student group within the College.

A third of respondents did not think it was a good idea and 13.2% didn't provide any answer.

Students were given space to make comments about why they did or didn't think it was a good idea, and these are interesting and thought-provoking.

The project has been a valuable exercise in exploring attitudes and raising the profile of the College commitment to LGBT issues.

A drop-in group now operates weekly for LGBT students and the Terence Higgins Trust holds a drop-in clinic on the 1st Wednesday of every month.

The Counselling and Support Area (CASA) team at TCAT has sought in the last three years to strengthen inclusivity across the college service through a range of strategies and promotions.

The summer term of 2009 saw a four-fold increase in students presenting issues of self and identity and there was a significant number exploring sexual identity.

A specific set of strategies were engaged to encourage and reassure students to bring LGBT issues to counselling and mentoring:

- including sexuality in the range of student issues used as examples in promotional leaflets and class talks about the support services.
- Ensuring visible commitment to supporting LGBT students through posters and leaflets in the CASA area and around student communal areas.
- Provision of training and awareness raising for all CASA support staff.
- The inclusion of homophobia in Bullying and Harassment material and a sensitive approach to investigating concerns

As time has progressed, more and more students are accessing the service, sometimes in couples and presenting issues not specifically focused on their sexuality, but able to express concerns as well, housing, healthcare, education.

Whilst there is much work to be done, the College wholeheartedly strives towards the moment when, in the words of one student, “everyone can learn to stop judging each other”.

References

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2. Dr. Pete Jones 'Shine'
3. Trevor Phillips, Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010)
p7
4. Aspinall and Mitton (2008) p55-74

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