Perceptions & Experiences of Rugby League:
Young LGBT people
Acknowledgements

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• Young People from LGBT Youth North West
• LGBT Youth North West leaders: Ali, Amelia and Sally
• Lou Englefield, Pride Sports
• Jenny Morris, RFL League for All Officer (London)
• Paul Scanlon-Wells, Rochdale Mayfield RLFC

Thank you for your time, energy, support and thoughts - your contributions have resulted in the following findings and recommendations which will be disseminated throughout Rugby League and LGBT communities and organisations

Many thanks

Sarah Williams
Equality and Diversity Manager
RFL
Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to write a foreword for this practical and influential piece of research into the perceptions and experiences of young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in relation to Rugby League.

This is the second in a series of research projects designed to give us a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Rugby League within underrepresented communities.

Rugby League is proud of its position as a leader in breaking down barriers and providing opportunities for minority communities which is based on being in tune with, and at the very heart of, the communities in which we operate.

The RFL is widely acknowledged as leading the way in LGBT equality and tackling homophobia in sport, a position that has been highlighted by a series of landmark achievements during the past few years;

- In 2009 the RFL became the first sporting National Governing Body to join the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme and we celebrated our second year as the only sporting organisation to be ranked in the Top 100 gay friendly organisations in 2012, reaching 53rd position.

- Championship side Sheffield Eagles received international coverage and approval when they became the first mainstream sports team to play a game wearing a shirt with a Homophobia Tackle IT! Logo emblazoned on the front in March 2011.

- In 2011 The RFL, Sheffield Eagles and all UK Super League teams signed up to the Government’s Charter to tackle homophobia and transphobia in sport and in recognition of this were invited to the Prime Minister’s annual LGBT reception at 10 Downing Street.

- Gareth Thomas was only the second UK sportsman to “come out” whilst still playing at an elite level, shortly before he joined Crusaders Super League team for whom he played until his retirement in 2011.

- Following a homophobic incident directed at Gareth Thomas the RFL developed and distributed guidance material for clubs on tackling homophobia issues effectively.

- Sheffield Eagles, RFL and Pride Sports Rugby League entered a float at Manchester Pride 2011.

- The RFL initiated the Rainbow Forum, an online group open to all LGBT staff, players, coaches, match officials, club staff and volunteers.

I’m confident that the constructive findings and conclusions found within this document will serve to enhance the RFL’s reputation as a forward thinking organisation and provide the Rugby League family with an even firmer footing to expand the scope and participation levels in our sport.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank LGBT Youth North West and Pride Sports for all the help and support they have given us in putting this document together. We are delighted that both these organisations recognise this initiative as a model of best practice.

Nigel Wood
RFL Chief Executive Officer
Foreword

The RFL has been at the forefront of the campaign to tackle homophobia and transphobia in sport over the past three years. Most visibly perhaps through the initiative of Sheffield Eagles RLC to wear an anti-homophobia strip during their Championship match against Widnes Vikings for LGBT History Month 2011. Other work, such as the RFL “Guidance for Rugby League Clubs Tackling Anti-Gay (Homophobic) Abuse and Behaviour”, launched in 2010, helped the rugby league community begin the process of making lesbian, gay and bisexual people welcome in the sport. It has also helped raise the issue for debate within a wider sport’s context and set a benchmark for action on LGBT inclusion in sport and physical activity.

This latest report provides a unique insight into the perceptions and experiences of young LGBT people in relation to Rugby League. It also contributes to the growing body of evidence highlighting the continued negative experiences of young LGBT people in school sport, which are of particular concern to Pride Sports.

The report concludes with practical advice for clubs, based on the experience of participants, on how to engage the LGBT community. Pride Sports believes that if these recommendations are taken up alongside other advice and guidance from the sport’s Governing Body, the Rugby League community has the potential to make its sport one of the most diverse and inclusive in the UK. Ultimately, Rugby League will benefit from opening up new markets for participation and engagement at all levels.

Lou Englefield
Pride Sports
Introduction

Despite extensive changes in social attitudes towards LGBT people over the last decade research shows that gay people still experience significant levels of discrimination and homophobia. Although gay people have an increasingly high profile throughout the world of business, the arts and media, sport is still perceived to be the ‘last bastion of homophobia’. Rugby League has been working tirelessly over the last four years to challenge these assumptions and to demonstrate that positive action can, and is taking place to ensure that Rugby League lives up to its values by welcoming LGBT people into our sport and tackling homophobia effectively when it occurs.

Sport plays a significant part in the lives of the UK population and within the family of Rugby League we have a proud tradition of being a welcoming and inclusive sport. Whilst we were delighted that Gareth Thomas felt able to be ‘out’ whilst playing Rugby League we also acknowledge that much is still to be done and this research project is another example of the efforts our sport is making to understand and address the barriers to participation.

There is a lack of research into LGBT people’s experiences of sports, compounded by difficulties gathering robust data due to concerns about introducing questions relating to sexual orientation in major surveys and research projects. Gradually this is changing and over the next few years we anticipate a growth in data and information relating to LGBT participation in sport and fitness, all of which will enable sport to be more inclusive.

We hope this small scale research project looking at the perceptions and experiences of Rugby League by young LGBT people will further assist our sport in reaching out to and engaging with LGBT communities and will contribute to the wider body of knowledge around LGBT people in sport.
Research model

Session 1: Tuesday October 25th 2011 LGBT Centre Manchester

• Welcome and introductions

• Share LGBT resources and information developed and produced by RFL

• Divide into mixed gender groups to consider the following questions

• What are your experiences of sport at school, sports club(s) and in the community?

• What are your experiences and perceptions of Rugby League? What are the barriers to participation?

• Are all women involved with Rugby League lesbian?

• Why is Gareth Thomas the only openly gay professional player in Rugby League?

• Review key rules of the game so that everyone is able to follow the match - hand out on rules of the game

• General discussion on their thoughts about attending the game

Session 2: Match day - Four Nations Final Saturday 19th November 2011 at Elland Road Leeds (England v Australia)

• Group attended the game and were then asked to complete a match day questionnaire (see appendix 1)

Session 3: Tues 29th November 2011 - 8.00pm - 10.00pm LGBT Centre Manchester and Sugden Sports Centre

• Welcome

• Match day feedback and collect questionnaires

• Skills / touch rugby session facilitated by RFL League for all Officer Jenny Morris and Rochdale Mayfield staff member Paul Scanlon-Wells

• Thanks to everyone for participating in the research

Members LGBT Youth North West group
Key issues

- The research suggests that one of the main barriers to participation is the lack of opportunity and awareness of the sport rather than a lack of interest in Rugby League. The young people all lived in and around the Manchester area and almost without exception Rugby League has not been offered in their school and was not a sport followed or enjoyed within their family. There was little awareness of Salford City Reds, their local Super League team, although some of the young people were aware of the Sheffield Eagles and had attended their tackling homophobia game. If young people have a lack of awareness and knowledge of our sport they are unlikely to feel comfortable getting involved therefore Rugby League needs to bring our sport to the LGBT communities.

- There is a general fear and anxiety around encountering homophobia and transphobia in the match day setting. The Rugby League LGBT initiatives and RFL commitment to tackling homophobia were seen as very positive and helped overcome some of these concerns, although more needs to be done to raise the profile of the match day text line service.

- The most significant barrier to participation appears to be their negative experiences of sport in school. Young people discussed how the homophobia they experienced in the changing rooms and showers meant that they were sometimes asked to change elsewhere rather than teachers challenging the homophobia of their fellow pupils. The LGBT young people also talked about avoiding team sport, especially those involving any degree of physical contact due to the homophobic accusations directed at them by their fellow pupils. Much work needs to be done with schools to tackle homophobia and Rugby League staff who already have positive relationships with many schools are well placed to share information and resources and assist schools in tackling homophobia and transphobia.

- The gendered nature of sport and the intersection of stereotypes relating to sexual orientation posed further barriers and limited opportunities for gay and trans young people to try a range of sports. If they did not conform to what were perceived to be gender norms they were labelled as lesbian or gay irrespective of their actual sexual orientation or gender identity. More research on this complex intersection of sport, gender, gender identity and sexuality needs to be undertaken in order to better understand the issues and identify strategies for overcoming these barriers. Rugby League staff can begin to address this by offering mixed gender sessions and touch / tag sessions as well as ensuring that they tackle any homophobic or transphobic behaviours or attitudes.

- There is a need to continue to offer opportunities and encourage participation in the sport and the wider game and build capacity of the LGBT community in order to develop sustainable participation. LGBT only environment may be necessary in the first instance and once confidence and skill levels have raised it might be that young people ask for your assistance in signposting them to mainstream touch or contact teams and to their nearest LGBT friendly clubs. Where possible identify a local Rugby League club (Super League and community) that is proactively working to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment and establish a partnership between the club and community.

- There is a need to market Rugby League to the LGBT communities and find opportunities to help people get involved in all aspects of the game not just as players and spectators. The young people have an enthusiasm for the sport and a real interest in playing / accessing further skills sessions following the match and the Rugby League taster session that took place on the follow up session.

- This consultation model can be replicated to help gain a real understanding of any community's experiences and perceptions. This model allows us to gain an understanding of the specific needs and experiences of the community identified rather than relying on our own assumptions which may in fact steer us in the wrong direction.
Findings & reflections

1) Experiences of sport in school

General views on sport in school

- Sports are compulsory and there was a mix of views from those that enjoyed sport. One participant described positively his experiences playing rugby as an opportunity to be aggressive in a legitimate way. Others found sport either boring or too aggressive, or 'horrible cos it's exercise'.

- After school sports clubs and teams were fun to get involved with until there was a tournament then it stopped being fun and was just serious and about winning. 'When you have to play matches against other schools it's not as good cos you don't know them'

- Sport can be cliques based on ability - if you were in the top group you played for your team and you had a high status, pupils in lower groups were regarded as playing in the rubbish teams

Sport as a gendered experience

- Sport in school is very sexist and gendered, boys being given the opportunity to play football, rugby and basketball, and girls steered towards badminton, hockey and netball, whereas tennis and swimming were offered to both boys and girls. 'Only girls do netball in our school and only with women teachers', although one young man in the group played for his school netball team.

- Girls were positively discouraged from trying any of the more 'aggressive' or contact sports such as rugby as concerns by teachers over potential injury “girls are not allowed to play rugby in our school cos you might get a nose bleed” this particular young women was disappointed that she was not allowed to play rugby. Young people also expressed their opinion that PE teachers think girls ‘are only capable of badminton and netball’.

- Single sex approach to sport and how PE lessons are structured limits the opportunities young people have to experience a range of sporting activities. For young trans people this presents almost insurmountable barriers to participation in sport

Sport, gender and sexual orientation

- People in school stereotype you based on whether or not you play sport or what type of sport you choose to get involved with: ‘if you are a boy and don’t play football you are gay and not cool'

- Team sports for gay young people also present particular challenges as if they make any contact with ‘straight pupils’ during the course of the game then they are accused of ‘touching up or groping ’ other pupils, therefore a contact sport such as Rugby League is particularly problematic.

- By far the most negative experiences for out gay pupils were the changing room and attitude of their peers to any physical contact during sports activities. A couple of young people described being removed by teachers from the communal changing areas and told to change in another room or in the toilets as other students complained that the gay pupils were ‘perving’ on them “can’t have gay pupils in the changing rooms cos they fancy everyone”. “Don’t want us in the changing room as the straight kids accuse you of checking them out.” Rather than dealing with the homophobia expressed by pupils, teachers responded by removing the gay young people instead.
Impact of other protected characteristics

• There is a lack of understanding as to why at certain ages pupils can no longer play sports in mixed teams and there doesn’t seem to be a consistent approach i.e. in football young women cannot play in mixed teams from a certain age but the same age cut off does not apply in Scotland and therefore a girl playing in a Scottish team was not allowed to play when her team came to play the final in England.

• School based sport and PE was also described as disablist, one young women spoke of her experiences where she was regularly removed from PE to do some extra work around literacy however in retrospect she feels she has missed out and was denied the opportunity to experience and benefit from playing sport, and to develop her physical and motor skills and build confidence.

Sport as a low priority subject in school

• PE is viewed as a low priority subject and if any pupils were struggling with any other lesson or behind with course work then they were removed from PE.

• Several young people said that while in years 10 and 11 they barely played any sport as “you could get away with not doing any sport and didn’t get into trouble for forgetting kit or any other excuse you could come up with.”

Reflections:

Specific:

Homophobia resulting from changing room experience is being compounded rather than challenged by teachers who, following complaints from ‘straight pupils about not sharing a changing room with gay pupils’, are making the young gay pupils change elsewhere rather than addressing the homophobic attitudes, beliefs and fears of pupils.

A significant number of the group had experienced being removed from PE either directly or indirectly, for example by teachers allowing them not to participate and by not imposing sanctions for forgetting kit, or by removing the gay pupils from PE in order to take part in extra English or other subject areas.

General:

Sport is clearly seen as a gendered experience and tied into assumptions around masculinity, femininity and sexuality. Some sports are perceived to be appropriate for either male or female participants and others seen as gender neutral. Young people who do not conform to these stereotypes in terms of the sport they play are often assumed to be gay. For example football is perceived to be a ‘boys sport’ and if you are a boy and don’t play football you must be gay! Similarly a boy that plays netball or is a gymnast is perceived to be feminine and therefore must be gay. With regard to young women those that play contact sports such as Rugby are assumed to be lesbian as it is not a feminine sport whereas a woman that plays netball or gymnastics is perceived to be straight as she is playing sports perceived to be feminine and appropriate for her gender.

Given the fact that some teachers are not challenging homophobia in changing rooms and whilst playing team sport, and are condoning or actively encouraging young LGBT pupils non participation in sport, it could suggest that teachers are using a range of methods of removing pupils from PE in order to avoid dealing with the homophobic attitudes of the wider school population.
2) Experiences of sport in the community

**Sport for fun**

- Some of the young people have experienced sport in a community setting and they were generally more positive about that experience as the focus was primarily on sport for fun and learning new skills in a supportive welcoming environment. Young LGBT people experienced less homophobia in the community setting than in the school environment.

- Pride Games (LGBT sports events in Manchester) was “fantastically good and you got a chance to try out new sports like archery, bellboat race and cycling. I saw one guy learn to ride a bike for the first time at Pride Games and you can improve from one year to the next.”

- “If sport in a club setting was more of a social experience as with the sessions run by Youth NW we might try out more sports activities and get involved.”

- Young people also enjoyed going to watch a range of sports such as ice skating, speed skating and ice hockey - the group members talked about these live sporting events as having good atmosphere.

- Youth NW have also provided many opportunities for young LGBT people to try new sports and activities such as cycling, archery, swimming, orienteering, badminton (led by a trans coach which was great) and a residential sports camp

**LGBT specific teams v mainstream sport**

- When you are starting out in a sport, getting involved in Pride Games is a way to build up your skills and confidence before you start out in the mainstream

- “Gay teams and sports can be really useful to get started and build confidence but I don’t want to feel forced to be separated from mainstream sports.”

- Finding out about LGBT sports initiatives and which clubs or groups are LGBT friendly can be very difficult especially if you live in a rural community or if you are not ‘out’

- Given that there are so few gay sports clubs and it is difficult to identify LGBT friendly mainstream clubs, travel can be a real barrier as young LGBT people may have to travel significant distances to get to a welcoming club and then have the worry of travelling back home late at night, especially if using public transport

**Competing demands**

- Sport is competing with so many other commitments and demands on young people’s lives such as studying, working and other social activities that unless you are really good at a sport you are less likely to get involved outside of school.

**Importance of the coach**

- One young woman talked about her experiences of Thai boxing where the attitude of the coach was crucial to her decision to leave the group, the issue wasn’t related to homophobia but to a lack of respect by the coach who in addition was also not encouraging enough and imposed training schedules on pupils that he didn’t follow himself.
Reflections:

Specific:

The key to positive community-based sports was the opportunity to play in a supportive and fun environment so that sport becomes a social experience focusing on building and learning new skills rather than just focusing on the contact and competition structure.

LGBT sports teams are valuable in building skills and confidence particularly if it is a new sport and in light of homophobia experienced in schools, but young LGBT people don’t necessarily want to be segregated from mainstream sport on a permanent basis, and would like opportunities to form links between community activities such as Pride Games and their local club or team.

General:

A legacy from experiences at school is a reluctance to engage with team based sports due to their experiences of changing rooms and homophobia by other players.

3) Experience of sports clubs

Lack of opportunity

• There are more men’s teams generally so if you are a women it’s much harder to find a club to play for, so often if you have played a sport at school as soon as you leave you can’t continue

• Very limited opportunities for trans young people to play sport in a club setting

Competition v fun

• “Clubs are for elite athletes rather than a place to go for a fun and social experience of sport; it is just about competition and winning.”

Team sports v individual sport and fitness

• ‘I wouldn’t consider joining a sports club although it does depend on what sport’. On the whole the group preferred individual sports such as archery, swimming, badminton, trampolining, gymnastics cycling and athletics. Negative experiences of school team sports and communal changing rooms, have meant most have not considered joining a sports club or team.

• Rugby League was included as a sport the group would consider - primarily as a result of the work we have been doing to make our sport more inclusive and also because some had attended the Sheffield Eagles game.

• “When I joined a women’s football team I was welcomed into the team it was a really positive equal and fair environment and no one bothered if you were gay or straight.”

• Some young people rejected some sports on the basis of assumptions and stereotypes they made such as “football is for chavs” and they therefore didn’t feel they would fit in.

Body image

• Many young LGB and in particular trans individuals have particular issues around body image, confidence to wear sports clothes / shorts etc and
changing rooms, and as such do not think a sports club would be a safe / welcoming environment.

**Importance of the coach**

- The coach at a club is a key consideration when deciding whether or not to get involved in the first place or stay at the club. Young people felt that an ideal coach is someone who is supportive and encouraging and does not have a win at all costs approach.

**Reflections:**

**Specific:**

Clubs are generally viewed as only open to elite or at least `good' athletes and not somewhere to go to learn a new sport or have fun.

The coach is seen as the most crucial element of a positive sporting experience and coaches who are supportive and encouraging and focus on developing skills and confidence, rather than a `win at all costs' attitude are more likely to successfully recruit new players and ensure they remain with the club.

**General:**

As a team based, male dominated, contact sport we need to continue to work to overcome previous negative experiences in the school setting and fears of homophobia. We need to build on slowly emerging confidence among LGBT people that Rugby League genuinely has a zero tolerance to homophobia and transphobia and is committed to inclusion.

**4) Perceptions, experiences and barriers to Rugby League**

**Atmosphere at games**

- The respect that Rugby League players clearly have for referees within Rugby League and union was noted and admired and contrasted significantly with the abuse and threatening behaviour demonstrated by footballers towards the referees. This was seen as a very positive aspect of Rugby League.

- Although the text line was welcomed as a positive initiative a couple of participants and group leaders pointed out the fact that the text line is not clearly visible at a match and clubs need to make more efforts to publicise the number and have it displayed in a prominent position.

- When reflecting on attending other sports events one individual said it is off putting to hear the frequency of homophobic comments by the crowd, where the word `poof' is used to describe any player that drops the ball, misses a cross etc. Although one young person said that as long as the person wasn’t directing the homophobic words at him specifically he could ignore it during the game, this would not be the case for all young LGBT or indeed straight people.

**Lack of coverage / visibility**

- Don’t know the rules, not brought up with the game so can’t follow what is going on

- No Rugby League in most of their local schools and girls not allowed to play where rugby is played.

- None of their family members attend or follow the game and so Rugby League is not part of their experience growing up.
There was considerable confusion between Rugby League and Rugby Union young people were not sure if games they may have seen on TV are union or league. There was a recognition among the youth workers in particular that in RL the club game has a higher profile than the international game and it’s the other way round for Rugby Union

Rugby League was not offered in any of their schools although union was at one boy’s school, therefore there is very limited knowledge of the sport, and with the exception of one, none of the participants have family members or friends that attend matches.

Their only experience has been that some attended the Sheffield Eagles game and there was little awareness of their local Super League club, Salford City Reds other than they were having a new stadium although they were unsure as to where it was.

Young people said it was difficult to support or follow Rugby League as on the whole it relies on access to Sky; the general complaint was “why are more matches not shown on terrestrial TV”

Men’s Rugby League is barely visible on terrestrial TV, women’s Rugby League is non existent

Transport / travel

Transport is a barrier to participation as many of the young LGBT people live across the area and are not local to Salford City Reds. Group outings with the Youth NW group might make it easier to organise and to go together to a game on an occasional rather than a regular basis. Young people said they would only want to go to a game as part of a group, not on their own.

Rugby League Stereotypes

Rugby League is seen as a sport for heterosexual, big, burly, masculine, well built men that are aggressive and violent, not something that many of the young people felt they identified with. They said that the media currently portrays gay men on TV as camp and effeminate and don’t show the diversity within the gay community, therefore perpetuating the myth that gay men don’t play Rugby League.

Additional barriers

Stadium access presented additional barriers for disabled LGBT people who want to be able to sit with their LGBT peers and not necessarily have to sit in a separate area

Reflections:

Specific:

The lack of exposure to Rugby League is the primary reason why there was so little knowledge of the sport. The participants have not experienced Rugby League in school, on TV, with their families and friends, or in the community.
An additional consideration is that there is confusion around Rugby League and Union; when watching on TV participants were unable to say if it was Union or League.

Although they have a Super League team in their area there was little or no knowledge of Salford City Reds and issues of cost, geography and lack of TV coverage of Super League games on a weekly basis makes it difficult to generate a regular fan base.

The perceptions that Rugby League is very much a masculine sport also presents particular barriers for young gay men in this cohort, who do not necessarily identify with this stereotype.

The fear of experiencing homophobic abuse or hearing homophobic comments from other spectators is a fear among some of the young people. Tackling homophobia is a priority for our game and our efforts have been widely praised - however there is a need to raise the profile and visibility of the text line service.

A mechanism described by one young man for coping with constant homophobia at a game is “to ignore it as long as it isn’t personally directed at me”. When asked to discuss this further young people said they would be reluctant to challenge homophobia directly at a game for fear of retribution, being targeted and possibly subject to physical attack, particularly if they were visibly gay i.e. holding hands or being affectionate.

5) Stereotypes and Assumptions

Women

- The group members felt that there is a widely held assumption that any woman who plays Rugby League must be a lesbian
- Perception that women should not play Rugby League as it is a man’s sport
- Most of the stereotypes around sexuality rely on outward appearances of individuals so there is an assumption among young people that a girl or woman who has short hair, wears trousers and is quite butch, muscular or aggressive must be a lesbian. Consequently the group talked about strategies that some sports women use if they don’t necessarily want to be identified or labeled as a lesbian. They grow their hair longer and wear make up and dresses thereby creating outward appearance of femininity and therefore being more likely to be identified as straight.
- The group could only identify a handful of women in sport, especially at the elite level, that are `out'. They felt that sport, and the media doesn’t seem to want out lesbian role models, what they want is heterosexual women or at least women that ‘don’t look or act gay’.

Men

- There are assumptions made about what it is to be masculine and being a gay rugby player is seen as contradictory.
• There is a popular media stereotype that gay men are camp, effeminate and amusing therefore if you are gay you can’t be seen as a strong competitive player.

• Depending on the sport an individual plays there will be different assumptions made regarding their sexual orientation.

• Difficult to come out as historically Justin Fashanu committed suicide following homophobia and racist taunting when he came out.

• If gay sports people decide to come out they inevitably do so towards the end of their playing careers or after their career finished. They can then rely on previous status and popularity to overcome the impact of coming out - they are less likely to come out at the start of a career.

• Financial consequences - possibly lose sponsorship but Gareth Thomas seems to have attracted positive media attention - has he benefitted financially since coming out?

• Gay sports are stars reluctant to come out due to negative stereotypes that all gay men are paedophiles or star in gay porn, and this is therefore not compatible with being a sports star who will come into contact with young fans as a player or coaching. Gay sport stars are not seen as positive role models for children and young people, by their parents unless they, or their children, are also gay.

• Don’t want to be out for fear of reproach or homophobic attitudes. Players may be accused of intentional and inappropriate touching and/or contact whilst playing.

• Despite the significant potential consequences to sports men and women coming out whilst playing or coaching the young people still felt that “more gay players should come out to prove we are not all camp fairies”.

Reflections:

Specific:

The impact of stereotypes and assumptions cannot be underestimated, particularly in the world of sport. Homophobic stereotypes cannot be successfully addressed in isolation of gender stereotypes as the two are inextricably linked. This has led to a culture where gay men feel the need to conceal their sexuality due to the stereotype that gay men are not man enough to play Rugby League and to ‘come out’ puts their career as serious athletes at risk. By contrast lesbian and bisexual women conceal their sexuality as to come out would only confirm the stereotype that women playing Rugby League must be lesbian.

General:

Social attitudes to gay people are slowly changing; there is clearly a shift in attitude by some media in relation to gay sports stars. Sport and the media in particular emphasise the importance of gay men coming out in their sport and if they do they receive a great deal of generally positive press (although the levels of homophobia directed at them by the general public or team mates may also occur)

By stark contrast it appears that the world of sport and media are not actively encouraging or supporting lesbian or bisexual women to come out as this would only confirm the stereotype that all women in sport are lesbians, rather they want to promote heterosexual women participants or at the very least women who from their outward appearance would appear to be feminine and therefore straight.
Match day experience
(post match questionnaire & feedback session)

Overall comments
• Apart from two of the participants, none of the young people had attended a Rugby League match before. In general the young people didn’t really know what to expect but were very excited at being given the opportunity to attend an international game at Elland Road.

• Young people were aware of the work Rugby League has been doing around tackling homophobia and in particular Sheffield Eagles anti homophobia game and this has increased confidence and interest in Rugby League

• Two of the young people said:
  “I am looking forward to seeing my first live sporting event watching live rugby”
  “I am looking forward to the atmosphere it’s the first game I’ve been to”

Traveling to the game:
• On the day there were a few difficulties regarding transport as the group had to travel from Manchester by train. For many of the young people simply getting to Piccadilly involved a significant journey as they live across Manchester and into the outlying area, indicating how greatly they value coming to the LGBT centre on a weekly basis.

• Once they arrived at Leeds station they had to take taxis and as they had not anticipated the delays in terms of traffic, as well as time taken to then find the ticket office in order to collect their tickets, this meant that they were late arriving at the seats and consequently missed all the pre-match entertainment and the build up to the event.

Accessing their seats
• The group members said that finding their way into the stadium and to their seats was difficult as they were unfamiliar with the area and the stadium. In addition on match day the sheer volume of the crowds was a little daunting for some of the group.

• Once in the stadium it was clear that some people were not sitting in the correct seats and as the game had just started the group didn’t feel able to make people move and so they were a little more dispersed than anticipated. The intention was that all the group would sit together in a small block but the reality was they sat in two groups a row apart

Atmosphere of the match / crowds
• The feedback from the young people was on the whole extremely positive:
  “I got more into it that I expected to and joined in the shouting and cheering”
  “It was a very friendly and safe atmosphere”
“I was surprised at how mixed the crowd was, there were children and older people and a lot more women than I expected”

“I liked the fact that there were groups wearing Robin Hood costumes and monkey costumes and wearing club shirts that were there with their friends having fun”

“I was surprised to see the crowds of fans were together and not in separate areas”

“Didn’t like the way we had to keep standing up to let people get past us throughout the game it didn’t always feel very safe. I thought it was very rude when people left before the end just because England was losing” (disabled LGBT spectator)

“One woman behind pulled me down whenever I tried to stand to see what was happening when the rest of the crowd stood up”

“I heard one or two homophobic comments and there was a little bit of language and stuff that I didn’t like but mostly it was a really great atmosphere”

“It was amazing the players tackled each other onto the ground, dust themselves down and were polite to each other - you would never see that in football, someone being tackled then getting up and not being aggressive to each other!”

“The players were so polite to the referee none of them had a go at the referee - you would never get that in football!”

“I thought it might be boring compared to Rugby Union as I like the scrums and line outs but I actually enjoyed it and would go again”

“It was interesting watching the screen and waiting for the video referee decision and being able to watch the replays, some people in the crowd helped too by explaining what was happening”

“Didn’t always understand what was happening - should have read through the information more before we came”

**Rugby League as a game**

- The overwhelming response from the young people was that they thoroughly enjoyed the game and got into it even though they didn’t necessarily understand what was happening at all times, their only disappointment was that England lost! They all said they really enjoyed it when a try was scored and the music played.

- Unexpectedly the aspect that stood out for the young people was the respectful behaviour and attitude of the players.

  “It was amazing, the speed, the replay on the screen”

  “It was amazing the players tackled each other onto the ground, dust themselves down and were polite to each other - you would never see that in football, someone being tackled then getting up and not being aggressive to each other!”

  “The players were so polite to the referee none of them had a go at the referee - you would never get that in football!”

  “I thought it might be boring compared to Rugby Union as I like the scrums and line outs but I actually enjoyed it and would go again”

  “It was interesting watching the screen and waiting for the video referee decision and being able to watch the replays, some people in the crowd helped too by explaining what was happening”

  “Didn’t always understand what was happening - should have read through the information more before we came”

  “A brand new experience for me and it’s good!”

  “Really enjoyed it and would go again”

**Overall experience and future games**

- The overall feedback was very positive and there was widespread agreement that they would like to attend another match, they all hope to go as a group to watch their local team (Salford City Reds) when the new season starts.

- Although one young person said he would go to a match with his family as they are already Rugby League fans the majority preferred to go as part of the LGBT youth group as it felt safer to be together and they would enjoy it more with their peers.

  “A brand new experience for me and it’s good!”

  “Really enjoyed it and would go again”
“Excellent apart from the end result - would go again”

“It was a great event and even though we lost it made me feel fantastic”

Reflections:
Specific:

The group found the match day experience to be better than anticipated and overall they spoke very positively about the experiences and enjoyed the exciting atmosphere. The respect shown towards the referee, and by players in general had a significant impact on the young people. They found this to be an admirable aspect of the sport and one they have not seen in football. All of the group felt safe at the event although one person mentioned hearing some homophobic language which they did not inform us of at the time. All of the young people said they would like to go to another match and to maintain their links to Rugby League therefore it is important that as a sport we capitalize and nurture this early interest in our sport. Their experiences could have been improved with more preparation and some of their comments and feedback have led to a range of recommendations regarding the match day experience.
Touch Rugby taster session
(12 young people)

Importance of coaches

• Through the Rainbow Forum network (a network for LGBT RFL staff, players, coaches, match officials, club staff and volunteers) the RFL recruited two coaches, one male and one female, who identified as LGBT to run a taster session in order to increase the confidence of the young people and raise awareness that there are LGBT people involved in all aspects of Rugby League.

• One of the coaches is also involved in a community club in the local area and so had invaluable local knowledge. The coach works for a club that young people could be signposted to should they decide they want to continue playing knowing that they had the full support of the coach.

• The coaches began with some simple invasion skills sessions which aimed to build confidence of the group and begin to get them moving. Even the young people that didn’t want to play were encouraged and supported to have a go and within ten minutes all of the young people were joining in.

• Throughout the session both coaches were very encouraging and praised the young people for their efforts.

• At the end of the session two young people spoke to the local coach and discussed coming along to the club to get involved in playing - he passed on his contact details and agreed to keep in touch with the centre and facilitate any young people wishing to get involved in the club.

Venue

• The LGBT group leaders booked a venue for the taster session as it was not possible to play at the LGBT centre. This proved challenging as they have a system in their local area that you can only book a sports hall the week before and they were unable to secure their local sports hall on the day we had arranged to hold the session.

• The leaders eventually found an alternative venue which was reasonably close but rather than being able to walk the group had to be transported by some of the group leaders by car.

• The only available time slot was 9.00pm - 10.00pm, making it a very late start time. This was a particular concern to RFL staff given that many of the young people then have to travel home on public transport. However the group leaders assured us that the young people were ok with the late hour.

Participant anxiety

• Some of the young people were initially very reluctant as they had not played a team based sport before and had significant anxieties about team sports following very negatives experiences at school.

• Coaches encouraged the participants to come along and try it, and there would be no pressure to join in and they would be starting off with some fun games to play. Both coaches emphasized the fun element of playing rather than any competitive element.
Experience playing touch rugby

- The coaches then introduced some team based activities based on netball and gradually led to playing a game of touch rugby. By the end of the session all the young people were fully engaged, clearly having fun and said they had not had so much exercise for months or years, many said they would like to play again.

- Even the young people that didn’t want to play were persuaded to have a go and within ten minutes all of the young people were joining in. Young people who took part in the touch rugby session said:

  ‘It was mint. And I learnt about where I can go to play nearer to where I live.’ Young Trans Man

  ‘It was good to have a go and to watch other people play’ Young Bisexual Woman

  ‘It was nice to meet people who were making sure that the game is accessible for LGBT people’ Young Lesbian Woman

  ‘I am going to go to a club now, and hopefully get involved and play’ Young Trans Man

RFL staff that organised the research sessions also agreed to look at ways that touch rugby could be incorporated into their sports camps for 2012 and to ensure there is touch rugby at Pride Games, an annual LGBT sports event held in Manchester.

General:

When working to introduce Rugby League to the LGBT communities a significant barrier is that negative experiences at school can lead to a reluctance to pursue team based sports, and instead focus on individual sports and fitness. Early indications from the first Active People’s survey to include questions relating to sexual orientation has identified that gay community are more likely than the straight community to take part in regular exercise, however, they are disproportionally represented in individual rather than team based sports. Thus we can conclude that there is an interest and commitment to exercise and fitness, but that Rugby League needs to work to overcome the initial resistance to team based sports by offering fun social mixed gender touch rugby sessions in a safe and supportive environment.

Reflections:

Specific:

Although not all the young people were initially keen to come along and try a rugby skills session the coaches and youth leaders managed to overcome that initial reluctance, and in total 12 young people came along to the session. This level of participation was achieved through being very encouraging, supportive and assuring the young people that you didn’t have to have any prior knowledge, skills or fitness levels. They could also sit out if they didn’t feel comfortable with any of the activities and there was a strong emphasis on having fun not competition. The skill of the two coaches was absolutely central to the positive experience that all the young people had.
Lynn Featherstone being presented with a Sheffield Eagles tackling homophobia shirt at a parliamentary event.

Sheffield Eagles, Oldham RLFC and RFL staff at Manchester Pride.

We all have to work together to challenge homophobia and stereotypes.

MITCH STRINGER
SHEFFIELD EAGLES PLAYER
# Best practice and learning

## Community Development Model for engagement with LGBT community

1. LGBT Training and awareness raising for staff
2. Identify resources that can assist you
3. Know your community - is there an LGBT group in your area
4. Establish partnerships with national and local organisations to facilitate access to and engagement with LGBT communities
5. Consultation with LGBT community - what do they want and need
6. Identify skills and interests of the community - consider wider opportunities for engagement
7. Long term sustainable approach
8. Develop the capacity of the LGBT community members
9. Evaluate impact and quality of experience
10. Share good practice throughout Rugby League

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| **Early experiences**                    | • Be aware of the negative experiences of school sports. They may have shaped young gay people’s experiences of sport and mean that there is an initial reluctance to engage with sport. Be ready to challenge gender stereotypes regarding sport and where possible begin with mixed gender skills sessions and touch / tag rugby.  
  • Young trans people in schools are particularly affected by the gendered nature of sport and particular efforts need to be made to include trans young people in sporting activities, therefore mixed gender skills and touch/tag rugby will be more appropriate and inclusive. |
| **Tackling homophobia and transphobia in school settings** | • When working in schools ensure schools are fully aware of Rugby League commitment to tackling homophobia and transphobia and to LGBT inclusion. Provide copies of key documents i.e. Rugby League LGBT initiatives leaflet, RFL “Guidance for Rugby League clubs on Tackling Anti Gay (homophobic) language or behaviour”, the Tackle It! posters, dvd and assembly plan and the RFL transsexual and transgender policy.  
  • It’s not just about delivering inclusive Rugby League sessions; consider delivering an assembly utilising the Tackle IT! resources and undertake a period of work with classes in school around inclusion and tackling discrimination as this is a part of the school’s PSHE and Citizenship requirements  
  • When working in a schools setting demonstrate an awareness of these issues in the planning and running of sessions. In particular be a role model for positive coaching and creating a fun, social and inclusive environment as well as more competitive opportunities according to the needs of the young people. |
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| Tackling homophobia and transphobia in school settings continued... | - Be aware of and challenge homophobic or transphobic comments and behaviour from pupils / young people you are working with, in particular the causal use of gay to indicate anything negative or inferior- do not ignore homophobic language or behaviour or think it doesn’t matter.  
- If a young person appears to be excluded from the group or team endeavour to find out why they are not joining in - are they being subject to homophobic or transphobic bullying what can you do to make the experience more enjoyable or positive and address any barriers you identify  
- For more support for schools you may be working with you could direct them to:  
  - RFL Equality and Diversity Manager and RFL Equity and Diversity website with downloadable resources appropriate for schools.  
  - Pride Sports who have facilitated anti homophobia sports sessions in the school setting.  
  - Stonewall who have a dedicated schools programme and resources  
  - Schools Out which contains school based resources and lesson plans around LGBT inclusion. (contact details at the end of this research document) |
| Changing rooms and shower areas | - A young gay person should not be asked to change separately, rather if young people complain about sharing a changing area they should be educated and told why their attitude or response is unacceptable and that you will not tolerate homophobic behaviour.  
- Provide additional support for the young gay person  
- Trans young people may experience particular anxieties around changing rooms. Whilst it is important to protect the rights of young trans people to be treated in the gender they identify and their rights to use the relevant changing areas, the reality is that many young trans people would be uncomfortable using communal changing rooms. Discuss their needs and what support you can offer for example are there any single changing cubicles that can offer additional privacy.  
- If you need further guidance refer to the RFL Transgender and Transsexual policy |
<p>| Young gay people are often subjected to homophobic abuse in these areas and accused of ‘pervsing on’ other students with students demanding that they change in another area |</p>
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| Working with LGBT organisations to deliver Rugby League | • Follow many of the recommendations when working in schools.  

• Ensure that staff who plan to contact the LGBT group are fully aware of LGBT issues and the importance of tackling homophobia and transphobia and are confident working with the LGBT community before embarking on such initiatives.  

• If possible identify LGBT coaches and if that is not possible then identify coaches that have a significant degree of awareness and confidence. Contact the RFL as depending on location and availability there may be members of the Rainbow Forum, a network of LGBT staff, players, coaches and match officials, who may be able to assist in this initiative.  

• Find out where your local LGBT centre or group is based, RFL and Pride Sports can assist with this.  

• Given the barriers facing the LGBT community in relation to sport it is important that you have a long term, sustainable and strategic approach to this work. A taster session followed by a ticketing initiative is unlikely to be successful.  

• It is important to recognise that the pressure to deliver participation targets can be at odds with a long term strategy to engage with under-represented communities. However they are an important potential new market that should not be overlooked in favour of short term gains.  

• When approaching an LGBT organisation or group you can raise their confidence in our commitment to LGBT equality and tackling homophobia by sharing copies of a range of LGBT specific resources developed by the RFL.  

• Identify venues that the group feels safe to attend as well as days and times. Be particularly aware that young LGBT people may be particularly vulnerable to homophobic abuse particularly if using public transport and consider travel to and from the venue. In the first instance an LGBT specific venue or neutral venue would be most appropriate. Inviting the group to a club is unlikely to be successful until you have established the group’s confidence and trust.  

• Learn from the group members in terms of appropriate terminology and inclusive practices. Above all if in doubt ask! If you say or do something that a member of the group challenges you about don’t panic or feel reluctant to return to the group. Learn from mistakes and by doing so improve your skills, knowledge and practice. Given the negative experiences of many young people in relation to sport it is important to begin by asking the young people about their specific experiences and interests in determining the most appropriate package for the group. However consider mixed fun skills sessions in the first instance as this will enable young gay and trans people to join in and enjoy the benefits of a team sport and improved
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| **Challenges of team based sports**  
Team based sports pose a specific challenge for young gay people particularly a contact sport. This stems from early experiences of homophobic abuse from team mates who accuse them of ‘touching up’ other students whilst playing, particularly if the sport includes any degree of physical contact. | • When reaching out to young gay and trans people it is important to be realistic, a contact team based sport is more difficult to promote given many young LGBT people’s earlier negative experiences of team sports.  
• Begin by building confidence that as a sport we have a zero tolerance approach to homophobia and transphobia and all sessions we be safe and inclusive.  
• Emphasize the fun, social and fitness aspects of a Rugby League taster session, reassure that it is non contact and requires no previous experience, knowledge or level of fitness.  
• Mixed tag / touch and skills sessions can offer opportunities for gay and in particular young trans people to get involved that have been previously denied them.  
• LGBT specific sessions will be easier in the first instance as it will be a safe environment for young people however with patience and support young people with a particular interest and skill level can be encouraged to consider mainstream clubs provided the club environment is inclusive and staff have received appropriate levels of training and awareness around LGBT issues. |
| **Rugby League not offered at their school or in local area**  
Where young people do have easy access to the sport it is less likely that they will have any knowledge or enthusiasm for the sport | • The capacity of club and community staff is a major consideration and particularly in development areas and it is unrealistic to be able to guarantee to offer the level of coverage that would ensure that all young LGBT people come into contact with Rugby League. However it is vital that clubs consider the needs of LGBT people when developing their participation strategy.  
• When working in schools and wider community remember that approximately 1 in 10 pupils will identify as LGBT. If you include the numbers of young people who have gay parents, family members and friends then the number of young people in schools who will benefit from a coach or club that has an inclusive approach, an awareness of LGBT issues and tackles homophobia and transphobia effectively cannot be underestimated. You may never know the positive impact you can have on the lives of gay young people but be assured that as a positive role model you can make a real difference to a gay young person’s life. |
| **Competition vs Social**  
Whereas some LGBT young people enjoy competition, for many young people with negative experiences of sports they are more likely to embrace a new sport such as Rugby League if it is promoted as a fun and social experience | • It is important not to make assumptions and generalisations about young LGBT people’s attitude to, and experience of sport, and in particular the competitive element as there are clearly elite athletes in all sports who identify as LGBT but they are not necessarily out to the wider public.  
• An individual approach will ensure that each gay or trans young person has the best opportunity to fulfill their potential.  
• However we should also recognise that for many young people, particularly young people who are or were out in school, their experience may have been negative and as such taster sessions based on a fun and social element may be more appropriate and be more effective in generating interest in our sport. |
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| Individual v Team sports  | • Early indications from the Active People’s survey (not yet published), which for the first time asked people to indicate their sexual orientation, suggest that there is a higher than average level of participation in sport and physical activity among LGB people than their straight counterparts, however they are disproportionately represented in individual sports and fitness rather than team games which may well reflect and corroborate the findings from this small scale research project.  
  
  • As a team sport Rugby League staff should be fully aware of the potential challenge of overcoming previous negative experiences however this should not be an excuse to avoid reaching out to the LGBT community. The RFL and other equity based organisations can offer support advice and information to assist in this work. |
| LGBT only v Mainstream     | • First and foremost ask the young LGBT people what they want and where possible try to respond to those needs  
  
  • Some people may consider LGBT specific teams and clubs to be divisive in that they do not appear to be inclusive. Setting up and developing LGBT teams and clubs may also present particular difficulties as it is unlikely that there will be sufficient numbers of LGBT people who wish to play Rugby League to create a vibrant competitive structure in order to provide opportunities for players to develop their skills and knowledge of the game.  
  
  • However when introducing a sport for the first time it may be more appropriate to offer taster sessions as an LGBT only group activities in a venue that they are comfortable and with coaches that you are confident are LGBT inclusive and aware of LGBT issues. Once young people have developed their skills and confidence they may choose to pursue Rugby League in a club setting.  
  
  • Before signposting young LGBT people to a club ensure that they are LGBT friendly and if possible assist with the transition to ensure that the young person feels welcomed and safe. |
| Creating a positive and inclusive environment | • For a young LGBT person coaches and club staff that are LGBT inclusive and challenge homophobia and transphobia may be particularly important and their impact as positive role model or as straight allies cannot be underestimated.  
  
  • If possible try to identify an LGBT coach to run the session, if you don’t have any ‘out’ coaches then ensure the coach is aware of LGBT Issues and comfortable coaching young LGBT people. Alternatively contact the RFL Equality and Diversity manager who could contact members of the Rainbow Forum and see if anyone is available to run one off coaching sessions or if there are any local LGBT members who could offer a longer term commitment.  
  
  • Before signposting any LGBT young people to a local club or community events and festivals ensure that you have worked with your staff and volunteers around LGBT awareness and the importance of tackling homophobia so that you are confident that you can provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBT participants. The RFL can assist with directing you to appropriate training opportunities and resources to support the club and individuals. |
## Issue Recommendations

### Role models

Role models in sport that young people can identify with are very important and this is also the case for LGBT young people

- Acknowledge that it is difficult to identify ‘out’ sports stars within Rugby League, Gareth Thomas who was until the end of 2011 playing in the Super League, has now retired leaving an absence yet again of high profile gay players.
- There may be local ‘out’ gay sports people, coaches and match officials at your local club or region who could provide invaluable support and assistance and be positive role models to young people. Contact the RFL to see if members of the Rainbow Forum would like to get involved.
- It is also important to remember that not all gay people want to or have the skills and qualities to be role models and champion LGBT equality and at no time should pressure be brought to bear on gay individuals to take on a more public role, neither should it be assumed that all gay people make good role models.
- If you are aware of any gay players, coaches, staff or officials make sure that you never disclose that information to others without the expressed permission of the individuals concerned. Confidentiality and respect for their privacy is paramount.
- Explain that the RFL is doing what we can to create a positive environment for gay Rugby League players, coaches and match officials in order to give them confidence that they will be supported should they come out. However we cannot force or pressure other gay players to come out.
- Focus on the important role of straight allies, for example Sheffield Eagles and in particular Mitch Stringer who is featured as part of the Tackle IT! programme and other players and clubs that support LGBT initiatives and take part in their local pride events. Emphasize that it is everyone’s responsibility; gay, straight or trans to tackle homophobia and transphobia thereby living up to the values of our sport as a passionate inclusive uncompromising family sport. Straight allies can become important role models to young gay and trans people.

### Match day experience

There are a range of simple steps you could take to ensure that young LGBT people have a positive match day experience

- Before attending a game spend time with the group going through the basic rules of the game, perhaps use some video footage of a match to explain some of the key aspects of the game.
- Provide a handout before attending the game with the basic rules and an explanation of the scoring, pitch layout and player roles within the team.
- Emphasize that Rugby League is a passionate, inclusive uncompromising family game - if you are aware of any gay fans or fans who are confident sharing their experiences with the gay and trans community invite them to come along to meet the group before attending the game to talk to them about their experiences and why they love Rugby League as a game and a match day experience.
- Before the game discuss where the group want to sit - do they want to be in the middle of the crowd and experience the atmosphere fully - warn the group that at times language may become a little heated or be seated in the hospitality areas which are generally more restrained but on the other hand may not provide the all encompassing match day atmosphere.
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<tr>
<td>Match day experience continued…</td>
<td>• Advise the group that they should not put up with homophobic language and that if they hear or see any unacceptable behaviour or language they could either tell the club staff attending with the group, inform the steward or use the text line number</td>
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<td>• Find out the text line number before the game and ensure all the group have input the number into their phones before attending the game and encourage them to use the reporting line as we cannot stamp out unacceptable behaviour and language if we don’t know about it at the time.</td>
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<td>• If you work or volunteer for a professional club ensure the text line numbers are displayed on hoardings, screens, jackets of stewards, posters in hospitality areas as well as concourse areas, on back of tickets, in programmes etc</td>
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<td>• Where possible offer a stadium visit for the group before attending a game. This will help orientate the group to the stadium as well as provide opportunities for the club to give the group a tour of the stadium, tunnel, changing areas, hospitality, trophy room and other memorabilia thereby increasing interest in the history of the club</td>
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<td>• For their first game it would be helpful if a volunteer from the club could meet the group before the game and travel with them to be able to assist with guiding the group to their seats and helping to resolve any seating issues as well as finding refreshment and toilet facilities. If this is not possible then provide a map of the stadium indicating where their seats are and which gate and turnstile they should use</td>
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<td>• If you are organising an away game or group trip to a centrally organised game it may be an opportunity to integrate the LGBT group by inviting them to join the club coach and travel to and enjoy the game with existing fans. An additional benefit of this is that the LGBT group will be able to access group discounted travel thereby reducing the costs of attending games, essential when trying to engage with groups whose members may be experiencing economic hardship</td>
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<td>• Consider offering group discounts rather than just family discount packages as part of the club ticketing initiative as this will help reduce the costs to the group. Young LGBT people expressed a particular interest in travelling to matches as a group as they felt less isolated or vulnerable than attending alone or as part of a family group.</td>
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<td>• Ensure tickets are provided in advance for the group so that they do not have the additional stress of finding their way to the ticket office before the game.</td>
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<td>• If possible arrange for the group to meet the players and/or club staff in one of the hospitality areas following the game, this will increase confidence among young LGBT people that the club is genuinely committed to becoming an LGBT inclusive club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming an LGBT inclusive club</td>
<td>• Before undertaking work with the LGBT community it is important that you ensure the club and its staff are LGBT friendly and has an awareness of LGBT issues and a genuine commitment to tackling homophobia.</td>
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<td>• Training - contact your local LGBT group they may be able to provide a training session for staff, alternatively you could choose to take up one of the free Equality and Diversity training days provided by the RFL for community staff which includes LGBT awareness.</td>
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<td>• Information and resources - access the RFL website Equity and Diversity section for a range of information and resources. Pride Sports, LGBT History Month and Stonewall all have a range of resources that you can download.</td>
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<td>• Through internet search, local CVS office or Pride Sport find out where your local LGBT groups and sports groups meet and how to contact them and initiate first contact and find out if there is an interest in finding out more about Rugby League. You can reaffirm Rugby League credentials in terms of our commitment to LGBT equality and tackling homophobia by providing a range of LGBT specific documents developed by the RFL:</td>
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<td>• Guidance for Rugby League Clubs: Tackling Anti Gay (homophobic) Abuse and Behaviour</td>
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<td>• LGBT Rugby League leaflet - highlighting the RFL and wider Rugby League LGBT initiatives</td>
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<td>• Perceptions and experiences of Rugby League: Young LGBT people - contains findings and recommendations for clubs wishing to engage with LGBT communities</td>
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<td>• Once the group has attended a game and expressed an interest in going to another match it is important that as a club you maintain that interest in order to convert this initial interest into genuine fans.</td>
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<td>• Don’t limit your opportunities for engagement to attending games also consider playing touch rugby, sport leaders, coaching, match official courses</td>
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<td>• Find out the skills and interests of young people, particularly those that said they are not interested in sport there may be other volunteering opportunities at the club that could benefit from the young people’s skills and interests i.e. IT, art and design, music, hospitality and marketing. They may belong to dance / music groups etc that could be offered the opportunity to perform at the club as part of the match day entertainments</td>
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<td>• Many large cities across Europe have a Pride event, some including floats and marches, others focus on community picnics and family based activities, increasingly they are providing sporting opportunities as part of their pride events.</td>
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### Issue

**Becoming an LGBT inclusive club continued...**

#### Recommendations

- Visit [http://ilga-europe.org/home/issues/assembly_prides/pride_events_in_europe/calendar](http://ilga-europe.org/home/issues/assembly_prides/pride_events_in_europe/calendar) or contact the pride organisers in your area to find out if they have a Pride event and if you can get involved:
  - Offer prizes for raffles and other fund raising activities (match tickets, signed balls/shirts, stadium tours and meet a player etc)
  - Take part in the Pride march where the club is seen as visibly LGBT inclusive - players, club staff and mascots would be very popular. Contact the RFL for additional support and resources around Pride events
  - Offer a touch rugby taster session or inflatable skills zone (depending on availability and cost)
  - Have information stalls about your club and activities at the Pride event
  - Offer a discount ticket in conjunction with Pride organisers to encourage people to come to a game
  - Invite LGBT groups to a game and consider LGBT entertainments, rainbow flags, articles on club website and in programmes or even wear an anti homophobia shirt at a game as worn by Sheffield Eagles

- Take advantage of national interest and media coverage of LGBT issues at key points in the year
  - February - LGBT history Month - you can advertise any LGBT initiatives on the national LGBT history website
  - 18th May - IDAHO day - International day against homophobia

- Your club as well as individual staff, players and coaches can sign up to the Government anti homophobia and transphobia in sport charter.

- If you are working with your local LGBT group be sure to inform the RFL Equality and Diversity Manager so that you can access the most up to date resources and information as well as providing an opportunity to showcase any examples of good practice throughout and beyond Rugby League and our sport can learn from any challenges and difficulties encountered.
Conclusions

• This model of research can be adapted to any community the RFL or club would like to engage with more effectively

• Research provides local understanding of perceptions, experiences and potential barriers and information about the specific group targeted

• An important barrier to LGBT participation is a lack of opportunity and awareness not a lack of interest

• Previous negative experiences of sport is more likely to be overcome with the introduction of fun, social, mixed gender, touch rugby session in the first instance

• Stereotypes, homophobia and transphobia must be recognised and challenged appropriately - doing nothing is not an option

• Share RFL LGBT resources and information with community groups and schools

• Community development model is more likely to lead to increased participation in all aspects of the sport and game:
  • Partnerships with local LGBT organisations
  • Consultation, ask what does the community want and need rather than assuming
  • Long term sustainable strategy
  • Developing the capacity of the local community
  • Equality and Diversity training for existing staff and volunteers is essential if our sport is to be truly welcoming and inclusive
Useful contacts

RFL
Sarah Williams
Equality and Diversity Manager
0113 2375037
Sarah.williams@rfl.uk.com

Or visit the RFL website to access a range of LGBT resources & information
www.therfl.co.uk/equitydiversity

RFL Rainbow Forum
A network for LGBT staff, players, coaches, match officials, club staff & volunteers
www.therfl.co.uk/equitydiversity/support_networks

Pride Sports
Leading UK organisation for LGBT Sports Development & Equity
Lou Englefield
www.pridesports.org

LGBT History Month
www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

Stonewall
Leading campaigning group for LGB rights & equality.
www.stonewall.org.uk

Home Office
Sign up to the Government charter to tackle homophobia & transphobia in sport
www.facebook.com/lgbtsportcharter
Guidance for Rugby League Clubs

Challenging Anti Gay (homophobic) Abuse and Behaviour

RAINBOW FORUM
A forum open to all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) RFL employees, coaches, players, match officials, support services & club staff paid or volunteers.

To find out more or join contact rainbowforum@rfl.uk.com