

LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES IN EMPLOYMENT 2021



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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, The Young Foundation, whose mission is to develop better connected and more sustainable communities across the UK, launched a Kickstart programme. For their second research sprint, they were co-commissioned by young commissioners from the Youth Futures Foundation future voices project. The Kickstart peer researchers set out to explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in and searching for employment.



The involvement of the young commissioners allowed the opportunity to centre the voices of young people in not only the collection of the research but also through the entire development of the project, including the commissioning and design. The peer researchers at the Young Foundation, hired through the Kickstart programme, were tasked with conducting the research.

By collaborating with the young commissioners, the peer researchers were able to centre the voices of LGBTQ+ in the research, which helped ensure the work is relevant to the communities it supports and informed by their own experiences. This allows for data with depth and nuance. This report has been produced by the Kickstart peer researchers.



INTRODUCTION

The aim of the report was to explore the experiences that LGBTQ+ young people have in employment including their time spent job-seeking.



This report shares some insight into the experiences and challenges that young LGBTQ+ people face in the workplace with recommendations for employers, schools and peers. In order for things to change, there are issues to tackle at different levels.

This report has been designed by The Young Foundation's peer researchers.



LITERATURE REVIEW

In exploring LGBTQ+ experiences in employment, researchers explored articles on topics such as discrimination, sexual assault, and the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with intersectional identities. Some of these include:

Working With Pride report – This report researched explicitly lesbian, gay, bi+ and trans+ people's views and experiences. The findings reflect that LGBTQ+ people do experience more inequalities than their heterosexual and cis-gender counterparts, and that there is a clear need for businesses to do more to truly realise the potential for inclusion.



National LGBT survey – The Government Equality Office launched a survey to gather information about the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in the UK. The survey response was unprecedented with over 108,000 responses, making it the largest national survey of LGBTQ+ people in the world to date. The report found that LGBTQ+ people are less satisfied with their lives, and that Trans people had particularly low levels of life satisfaction.

Shut Out – This research looked at the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people who were not in education, employment or training. The report sets out key steps that national and local governments across England, Scotland and Wales, along with relevant agencies, can take to better support LGBT young people, and help tackle the discrimination they face.



Stonewall – LGBT in Britain – This report interviewed 3,213 LGBT employees to gain a greater understanding of what life is like for LGBT people in Britain's workplaces. The report revealed the troubling discrimination.

Identity:

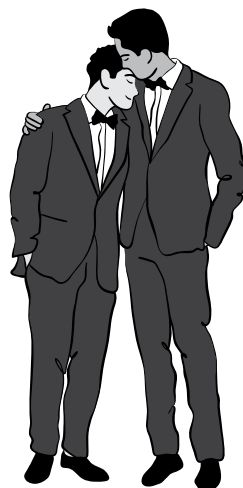
- 2.5% – 5.43% of the population of England self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi+ or 'Other' (Business in the Community, 2019)
- At least 1 in 100 people experience some sort of gender variance and about 0.2% may undergo transition (Business in the Community, 2019)

Discrimination:

- 11% of all survey respondents in the workplace had experienced their LGBTQ+ status being disclosed without their permission (Government Equalities Office, 2018)
- One in ten Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic LGBT employees have been physically attacked by customers or colleagues in 2016 (Stonewall, 2016)
- 56% of LGBTQ+ respondents said they felt uncomfortable being open about their sexual orientation in the workplace (Business in the Community, 2019)

Physical/Verbal Assault:

- 68% of LGBT people have experienced harassment in the workplace (Hunte, 2019)
- 27% of LGBT people have received unwelcome sexual advances (Hunte, 2019)



GAPS IN RESEARCH

The literature review highlighted a number of gaps in research to explore and examine. This includes UK-based research on:

- LGBTQ+ research into employment focusing specifically on the experiences of young people
- UK-based research into ethnic minorities looking for employment and their experiences in employment
- Non-binary/genderqueer focused research
- Research on LGBTQ+ people's experiences in education
- LGBTQ+ peer-led research
- Comparisons on the treatment and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ population by generation
- The support offered to the LGBTQ+ disabled people in the workplace

After analysing the gaps in the literature, the Kickstart peer researchers decided to make the experiences of young LGBTQ+ people in employment, the main focus of their research, seeking to identify the possible struggles or setbacks young people in particular face when trying to gain employment and through the interviewing process as well.



METHODOLOGY

Sampling and data collection:

This research project used qualitative data collection methods. Using semi-structured interviews, where questions are open-ended and free-form, allowed for richer data collection. This built a deeper understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in employment.

With the help of the young commissioners, the Kickstart researchers created interview scripts that outlined specific areas to address. This was used as a basis for interviews with twenty young people who were interviewed aged between 18 and 25, who were members of the LGBTQ+ community. The interviews were carried out online and in person. In addition, The researchers also asked for people of colour (POC) and disabled members of the community to take part.

Two methods were adopted to gain participants; a poster was shared on online platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Nextdoor. In addition, the researchers used snowball sampling, whereby the people interviewed recommended other people who might be interested in participating, as well as the peer researchers drawing on their personal networks.

Analysis of data:

After transcribing these interviews, the peer researchers analysed the data using thematic analysis, an approach that involves coding responses and grouping them into common themes. An example of a code can be something such as pronouns, emotions, or experiences to name a few, highlighting broader themes that emerged through the interviews.



METHODOLOGY

Limitations:

Whilst a strength of the research was that it managed to gather a rich data pool, there were some limitations. For example, there was a rather small participant pool as a result of limited take-up on our social media posts. However, despite this, the data is rich and useful. The interviews also included fewer people of colour than originally hoped for. Therefore, future research done on this topic should look into this as an area of interest.



YFF Contribution:

The Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) delivered several co-production sessions which covered topics such as the co-commissioning process, research design, data analysis and output creation. The YFF gave The Young Foundation's peer researchers regular feedback, which helped support them in forming this research project, and which the researchers are very grateful for.



WHO TOOK PART

Some 20 young people aged between 18 and 25, living in the UK, took part in online interviews. To make sure participants were comfortable, they were given the option to skip any questions they didn't wish to answer.

Chart 1: The employment status of the interviewees

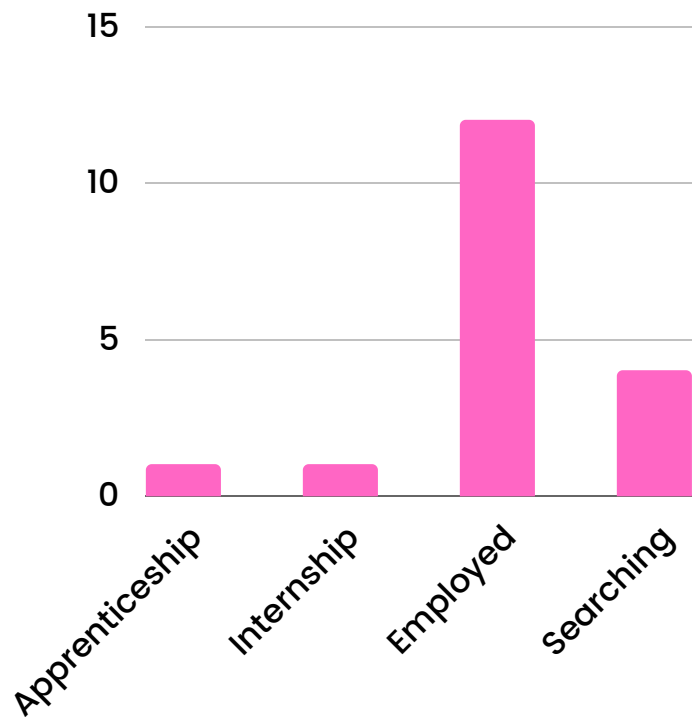
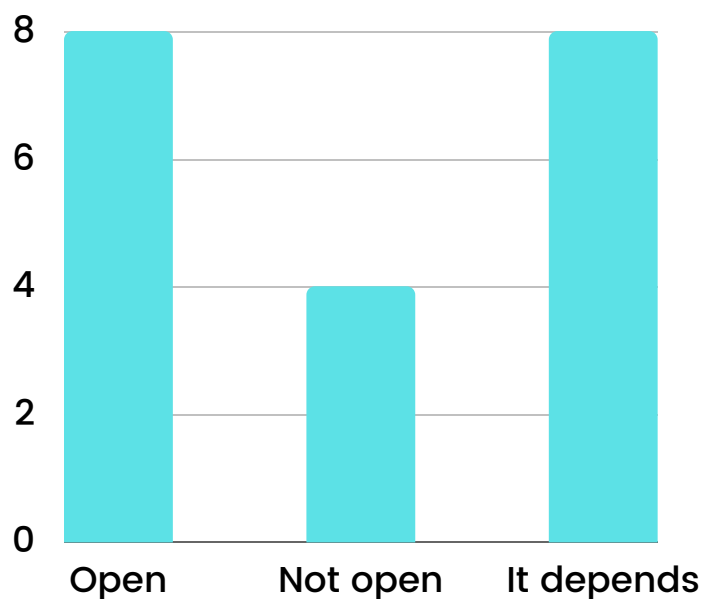


Chart 2: Those that choose to be open about their LGBTQ+ identity in the work place



Note: An oversight meant that data on the race and ethnicity of participants wasn't collected.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To understand LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of employment

- How well does education prepare LGBTQ+ young people for employment?
- Do LGBTQ+ individuals feel that their identity/identities affects access to employment?
- Are the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals being met when trying to access employment?
- What impact does the intersection of identities have on LGBTQ+ young people when accessing employment?
- Are there areas of employment that feel less accessible to LGBTQ+ people? And why might this be?



FINDINGS

The main goal for this research project was to explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in employment and when searching for employment.

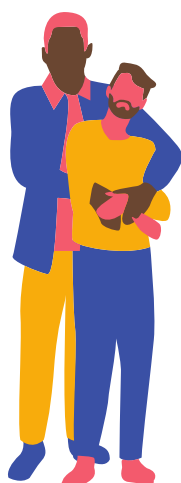


The research found that most, if not all, young people in the LGBTQ+ community are struggling with the fear of being discriminated against, judged and even hated for being LGBTQ+.

Most participants worried they might face old-fashioned views in the workplace, but this stopped few or no participants from looking for employment. It still causes them to have anxiety and worries, which makes some young people avoid certain types of employment such as retail and building sites for fear of being discriminated against.



The research findings can be grouped under five main themes: unequipped; masking and conflict avoidance; workplace culture; banter; and intersectional identities.



Unequipped

- Young people felt that their educational experiences didn't equip them for entering into employment as LGBTQ+ people
- Participants felt they should have received more help to know and understand their rights in the workplace
- Some stated that they felt lessons were directed to straight peers and excluded LGBTQ+ students
- Some participants felt that topics such as sex education, neurodiversity and relationships should also include LGBTQ+ voices

“In school, I was wearing a pride badge and was asked to remove it. I was so shocked; I do feel like they could've and should've promoted LGBTQ+ in a positive way rather than ignore the topic completely”



“We aren't taught our rights and how to look out for and report these instances, so employers who hold these views are able to get away with being discriminatory”



Masking and conflict avoidance

- Many participants said they masked their sexuality to protect themselves in the workplace. The method of masking is also known in the community as straight-passing, which is where they can seemingly blend in by faking straightness
- Participants who said they masked their sexuality also disclosed that they feared getting 'outed' by colleagues, meaning they would avoid calling out discrimination such as homophobia or transphobia
- They also felt they needed to mask due to the workplace environment not feeling like a safe and supportive place



“I do wish companies made their settings a safer space for LGBTQ+ folk. In old jobs I’ve had, I’ve been scared that people might find out I have been in a relationship with another male. I thought they would stop liking me...”

“I think everyone at work just assumes that I’m straight and I feel more comfortable almost just flying under the radar than being myself”



Workplace culture

- Participants discussed feeling increased anxiety in the workplace when surrounded by older people, particularly middle-aged white men and people who seem to have conservative views, possibly informed by the continued assumption that these groups are less likely to be accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals

“It depends who I’m around. I guess an older man who was very conservative, I’d be more anxious about mentioning it... It’s definitely a stereotype and something that’s been built up overtime that older people obviously aren’t as accepting.”



Banter in the workplace

- A few participants spoke about the environment in the workplace and how comments said as ‘banter’ (jokes) can create a very hostile working environment, making individuals within the LGBTQ+ community feel isolated. This shows that throwaway comments made by people outside of the community can increase anxiety for some folks to come out at their workplace and also affect their relationships with co-workers

“I have heard quips and jokes about other members of staff. It’s demeaning and humiliating. I hate that throwaway comments can cause such intense negative emotions”



Intersectional identities



- A lack of access, education, and government intervention has resulted in inequality when it comes to fair and accessible employment for disabled LGBTQ+ individuals
- Some white participants interviewed did not feel comfortable answering on behalf of the POC community about something they have never experienced personally – we felt this was positive as many participants acknowledged their position
- Participants who did discuss this issue discussed how POC are expected to conform to a certain white standard
- Some participants mentioned the fact that Trans POC experiences some of the highest levels of discrimination and abuse within employment

“I don't think I'm fully capable of commenting on it – but from everything I've seen for a long time, and especially since the Black Lives Matter movement, you can- it's easy to, it's a lot clearer to see [...] when people are being racially biased”

“A double dose of discrimination. It's hard enough managing to get through society being gay alone. Not to mention any other diversity on top of that”



WHAT IS NEEDED?

The Young Foundation's Kickstart peer researchers came together to identify some recommendations from their research that might make employment better for LGBTQ+ young people:

Employers

- Companies and senior management need to take complaints of discrimination more seriously to spread the message that it will not be tolerated
- Workplace cultures need to be addressed to create supportive, accepting and safe workplaces
- During the interview process, asking for pronouns and giving interviewees the option of being referred to by a preferred name would make it more LGBTQ+ friendly
- Employers should make it optional to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity and should not bring it up if it is not relevant
- To allow for background checks, have a section on employment forms for birth and preferred names – but keep these documents confidential to safeguard trans and genderqueer/nonbinary people
- Companies need to make sure they are open and state clearly that they are in support of equality and diversity on promotional material and ensure their practices reflect this



WHAT IS NEEDED?



Schools

- Educate students on LGBTQ+ topics when teaching sex education and when discussing employment
- Make sure that employability support in education accounts for LGBTQ+ experiences and the challenges they may face when entering and during employment
- Educate students on their rights when they enter the workplace and how to report discrimination if they encounter it

Peers

- Be accountable for your own and others language when discussing LGBTQ+ individuals – call out any discrimination you hear within the workplace and report it
- Help keep the workplace environment safe and accepting of everyone



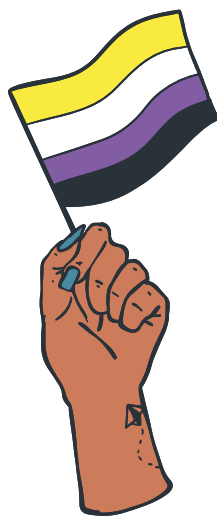
CONCLUSION



This research shows that there is still room for much improvement when it comes to the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people within the workplace.

Whilst the form of discrimination may present slightly differently now, and may sometimes appear rather innocent in the form of 'banter', it continues to have a very severe impact on the job opportunities of the LGBTQ+ community. From avoiding entire careers to not fully taking part in their workplaces due to a fear of having their identity revealed, LGBTQ+ individuals continue to feel they are not safe in their jobs.

However, this research has led to recommendations that have the potential to improve workplace environments for LGBTQ+ individuals. From including questions about pronouns in the interview process to making it optional whether individuals disclose their LGBTQ+ identity or remove this question full stop. These small suggested changes can make a big difference in making the entire employment process much smoother for LGBTQ+ individuals and make them feel more at ease in a safe, inclusive workspace.



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