

# Count for sport



## tackling transphobia in sport

transgender specific companion report



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# introduction

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**Sport has an important and positive role to play – in our communities, in our culture and in improving Scotland's health. By its very nature, sport is also an ideal arena in which to tackle discrimination and to champion equality of opportunity and fair play for all. There should be no place for transphobia in sport.**

This document is a transgender specific companion report to the Out for Sport Research. 6.7% of the 1,722 respondents to the Out for Sport online questionnaire identified as transgender people and this report highlights the viewpoints of these 115 trans respondents. (The questionnaire defined transgender as an inclusive umbrella term for a diverse range of people who find their gender identity or gender expression differs in some way from the gender they were labelled at birth.) It looks at their perceptions of transphobia in sport and also explores barriers in accessing changing facilities and competition which affect transgender participation in sport.

A copy of the full Out for Sport report is available from [www.outforsport.org.uk](http://www.outforsport.org.uk) or by contacting the Equality Network.

We would especially like to thank all the participants who took part and the BIG Lottery Awards for All programme for funding this research.

# survey responses



## Do you think there is a problem with transphobia in sport?

An overwhelming majority of trans respondents, over **75%**, were of the opinion that there is a problem with transphobia in sport. Only **4%** of respondents did not believe it to be a problem, while **21%** stated that they were unsure.

Respondents who chose to say why they feel there is a problem with transphobia in sport described a range of reasons relating to: the experiences of trans and intersex athletes, or those perceived to be; opportunities for trans people to access community based sport and leisure facilities; and their experiences as spectators or of the behaviour of spectators.

"Transphobia is accepted as funny, and a valid way of insulting and damaging a sports personality and excluding people from taking part."

"...media articles bringing up the issue of masculinized women in sports such as tennis and running and then forcing them into sexual affirmation tests that must surely be degrading to the person, are clear indicators that some people definitely have a problem in regards to sex and gender in sports."

"I pass as normatively gendered but my partner often does not. We carefully avoid sports venues and sometimes choose to stay in on nights when there's a big game on because we feel threatened by transphobic remarks we have heard in that context."

"non-competitive individual sport is difficult to take part in if people are prevented from using the appropriate changing room."

## Have you personally experienced or witnessed homophobia or transphobia in sport?

Some **80%** of trans respondents answered yes to this question. Of that group, **96%** stated they had experienced or witnessed verbal abuse, **16%** physical abuse, and **7%** other forms such as sexual assault. The respondents were given the opportunity to describe the kind of experiences they had encountered. Again, it is interesting to note that these experiences were had in the context of participating in competitive and community sport and leisure activities, and in relation to spectators.

"When i first went into transition i experienced abuse in public from football supporters"

"When I used to swim competitively I encountered prejudice because my body was a different shape from other people's (I'm intersex) and, even though I was not out about my non-binary gender identity, people called it into question as a result of that. I was afraid that if I reached higher levels of competition I would be cast out of the sport because of my intersex variation."

"Transphobic abuse shouted at a player by several members of the crowd accusing the player of cross-dressing."

## Do you think enough is being done to tackle homophobia and transphobia in sport?

**77%** of trans respondents answered this question in the negative. The main comments which this question elicited from respondents were that the lack of any advertising campaigns tackling transphobia and the absence of high profile trans sports personalities contributed to the feeling that not enough was being done. In terms of what should be done to improve matters respondents were given a number of options to choose from, from which they could choose more than one. The two most popular responses, chosen by **79%** of trans respondents, were a high profile anti-homophobia/transphobia campaign and diversity training for sports facilitators/coaches/participants. That these were the two favoured approaches is indicative of the two main contexts in which those surveyed reported having witnessed or experienced homo/transphobia – in elite sport, and community based sport and leisure activities. Other popular strategies, chosen by **77%**, **72%** and **71%** of respondents respectively, were challenging homophobia and transphobia more often, encouraging more sports stars to come out and encouraging more LGBT people to take part in sport.

## Do you think it is important that there are 'out' LGBT sports personalities?

It is interesting to note that when specifically asked this question over **90%** said yes. So while having openly LGBT sports people may not be seen as the highest priority in terms of reducing homo/transphobia it is very clear that people would value it if more were open about their sexuality and gender identity. Many of the respondents who chose to discuss why they felt this was important mentioned the benefits of trans people being visible and the need for young LGBT people to have positive role models. The predominant reason chosen by respondents for the lack of out LGBT sports personalities was the abuse that they may suffer from spectators.

## Who should be taking a lead on tackling homophobia and transphobia in sport?

Again respondents were able to choose more than one of a number of options. **89%** of respondents were of the opinion that sports governing bodies such as the Football Association should lead on this issue.

"I think... what can be done is sporting bodies can come out and say that being prejudiced against transgender individuals is not ok."

The second most popular choice, at **78%**, was for high profile sports personalities to bear responsibility for reducing transphobia. The high media profile of many non-trans sports personalities means that they are well placed to make a significant public impact by taking a stand against transphobia. This is not the same as expecting trans sportspeople to have to stand up on their own against transphobia and some respondents felt that it is not yet safe for athletes to be open about being transgender, both in terms of their career success and physical and mental wellbeing.

"There needs to be more out players but the prejudice and ignorance on the fans side perhaps makes it too difficult for a footballer to be out."

Respondents were also very keen to see schools have a primary involvement in reducing discrimination, **74%** of respondents choosing this option. Throughout the survey, in response to a variety of questions, many trans respondents related their negative experiences of sport at school. It is not therefore surprising that this is an approach suggested by the majority of participants.

"I was continually pushed around at school and youth groups when trying to participate in sport."

"Someone being cut from the team because of their gender identity. They were excluded and ridiculed by the coach and other teammates. The school never stood up for them and they weren't allowed back on the team for the remainder of their school career."

"I was humiliated by the head PE teacher in front of a gym class. I was regularly humiliated in changing rooms, and would do everything to avoid attending PE."

## Is homophobia or transphobia a barrier to LGBT people participating in sport?

The impact of discrimination can be seen in the answer to this question which **79%** of trans people answered in the affirmative. The following comment succinctly sums up why this may be the case:

“...who wants to be teased, mocked and be made the butt of jokes in the showers, on the playing fields, in the pub?”

The number of trans identified participants who felt transphobia is a barrier to sports participation was fairly significantly higher than the number of non-trans respondents who see homophobia or transphobia as a barrier – that being **65%**. This suggests that prejudice may be more of a barrier to trans people participating in sport than it is to those who do not identify as trans. The figures as to respondents' involvement in sport or physical activity tend to support this suggestion. **22%** of trans respondents stated that they never participate in sport or physical activity and **30%** stated that they are never involved as spectators, compared to **15%** and **18%** respectively of non-trans respondents. However, in looking at these figures consideration must be given to the fact that a higher proportion of trans identified respondents indicated that they are disabled, **25%** compared to **13%** of non-trans respondents, and this may have an impact on their sports participation.

## Would you be more likely to participate in sport if it was more LGBT friendly?

Again, the proportion of trans people who said yes to this question, **68%**, was substantially higher than the proportion of non-trans people, only **44%**. It definitely appears therefore that trans survey respondents are more likely than people who haven't identified as trans to currently not be participating in sport as much as they would if it were more LGBT-friendly. The survey further identified a disparity between the proportion of trans respondents of the opinion that there is a need for LGBT-specific sports clubs, teams or activities and the proportion of non-trans people with the same opinion. Whereas **46%** of the former group answered this question in the affirmative only **29%** of non-trans respondents felt that there is a need for LGBT specific sports provision, with **42%** disagreeing with this proposition. Many of the trans respondents who commented on this question hoped LGBT specific clubs would only be necessary for a limited amount of time until mainstream sport has become more trans inclusive.

# access to changing rooms and facilities



One of the main barriers to participating in sport raised by trans respondents was the lack of changing and leisure facilities which meet the needs of trans people. Transgender interviewees identified a number of issues around changing rooms including the fact they are usually gender specific and lacking in privacy. Respondent's related their concerns about their ability to pass as the gender they identify as in such an environment. Issues around body scarring or body image and fears of having their gender identity challenged by staff and other facility users meant that many transgender people were anxious about entering sports facilities and taking part in sport.

**"Transphobia since I have come out, this is mainly in changing rooms... shouting what the f\*\*k are you doing in here it's a men's room."**

In order for sports and leisure facilities to be more trans inclusive they should clearly describe their changing room provisions, stating if there are gender neutral changing areas and what level of cubicle privacy users can expect within gender specific changing areas. This would not only be appreciated by trans people but by a range of people who would feel more comfortable changing in privacy.

City of Edinburgh Council had recently undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment around the refresh of their Sports and Physical recreation Strategy for Edinburgh. They had consulted with LGB people however, when the Out for Sport researcher examined the EIA it was clear that transgender issues around changing room provision had been overlooked. They'd also completed a piece of work on access to facilities within which the Director accepted there was nothing about transgender issues. She accepted that was a gap and said she was keen to see that addressed.

However, even with the provision of adequate changing facilities many trans people may still be anxious about how to maintain a clear gender presentation while taking part in sport without the usual clothes, makeup, prosthetics etc they usually wear. People will often have to make a judgement call about how many of their usual ways of coping with their body's characteristics they can continue to take without impairing their ability to exercise or take part in sport. Breaking down this barrier may require a more fundamental shift in the public's attitudes, expectations and presumptions around gender expression and presentation.

# access to competition

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In terms of competition, the Out for Sport research found that trans people are often precluded from or face substantial difficulty in accessing competitive sporting opportunities. As most Scottish Governing Bodies (SGBs) do not have specific policies in place as to how to facilitate trans inclusion there is uncertainty around how trans participants will be treated when trying to access sports regulated by particular bodies. SGBs should address this so potential trans participants are clear about how they will be enabled to compete. Some Female to Male (FtM) trans players, particularly in contact sports such as rugby union, have also had issues obtaining insurance. Caledonian Thebans players initially had such difficulties because the insurance company felt they'd be at greater risk playing against non-trans males. For Male to Female (MtF) trans people the biggest issues tend to come from other peoples' concerns about fairness of competition and the potential physical risks of competing against them.

The UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport have issued useful guidance for sporting bodies on "[Transsexual people and sport](#)" however it predates the Equality Act which supersedes the legislation in place when the guidance was written. It states, "[The legal requirements need to be understood and taken into account by sporting bodies in their dealings with transsexual people, whether as participants in sport or as employees. However, S19 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 does not give transsexual people an automatic right to participate in competitive sport alongside other people of their acquired gender. In certain circumstances the participation of transsexual people in sporting events may be legitimately restricted in order to ensure fair competition or the safety of competitors.](#)"

This may only be done where the body is responsible for regulating an event, where the sport is a "[gender-affected sport](#)" which means one where the physical strength, stamina, or physique of average persons of one gender would put them at a disadvantage to average persons of the other gender and the prohibition is necessary to secure fair competition or the safety of competitors, including the safety of the transsexual competitors. Where these conditions are not fully met, transsexual competitors should be allowed to compete in their acquired gender. The restriction only applies to competitors.

The DCMS guidance suggests that "[individual sports are best placed to decide on what basis a situation might arise whereby a transsexual person's participation poses risks to safety and](#)

fair competition... the application of one model set of regulations would be inappropriate... For many sports bodies, guidance from International Federations will support this process." In terms of high performance sport, the International Olympic Committee set out its policy on selection and participation in the Olympic Games in 2004 and this may form the basis on which International Federations set their own policies and direct their national federations. The DCMS guidance also covers sports club membership and says that "transsexual people can expect to gain access to such clubs in the same way as any other individuals. In single sex clubs they can admit transsexual members "provided they can show suitable identification in the appropriate gender".

They suggest that it is good practice in club or facility management to provide changing facilities with cubicles and where none are available club officials should discuss with the individual where they would be most comfortable changing. There should be courteous and sensitive treatment from staff or club officials and an equality policy that outlines the facility or club position on transsexual people and participation including action that can be taken in the event of discrimination. It advises NGBs and others to "Review existing policies and procedures in light of the Gender Recognition Act to ensure transsexual people aren't being discriminated against illegally. Any changes should be based on consultation with relevant groups and individuals and be published."

Two SGBs reported having experienced a trans person wishing to participate in their sport. The Scottish Football Association stated that an approach had been made to them some years ago by a player who had transitioned from male to female. They were however unable to recall the conclusion of the enquiry. The Scottish Rugby Union [SRU] described how they had successfully facilitated the inclusion of a trans woman in the sport and were the only SGB who were able to provide an insight into how an application by a trans player was dealt with. The head of Women's Rugby had worked with medical colleagues and others to develop a policy and put procedures in place to enable the player to participate.

"Our process involved myself and the medical director in checking all the regulations coming out from the International Olympic Committee [IOC] and the International Rugby Board [IRB]. We pulled that together and then devised a flow chart to make sure we're meeting all of those regulations ...We didn't really have to look at the safety of players and so on because the IRB had already looked at this, had already devised a process for us... So we have IOC, IRB and SRU processes and they're all in line and linked and we made sure nothing we did was out of line with them. She's now playing. The players playing with her don't know, that was one of the areas we had to ensure was how we maintained the confidentiality of that request both internally and externally while we were processing the application."

While the **sportscotland** Institute of Sport has not dealt with a transgender elite athlete, preparatory background work is being carried out by their Performance Lifestyle team. A senior member of the team explained: "In terms of my work with the institute and elite athletes I've not dealt with a transgender individual. However, I work closely with the medical team and we do case studies if we see world examples come up that we might need to understand." Describing an incident at the Beijing Olympic Games where a female track athlete was forced to undergo tests to ascertain her sex he went on to say: "We looked at that in terms of what a governing body would do, what the British Olympic Association would do, what sort of support we would give."

# recommendations



**We all want a Scotland free from prejudice and discrimination, and we recognise the significant role and influence sport has in achieving that aim. We also want a healthy Scotland where, again, sport plays a vital role, and the barriers to the full and active participation in sport should therefore be examined and removed.**

Recommendations in the Out for Sport report seek to achieve three key objectives:

- » Leadership to ensure the elimination of homophobia and transphobia in Scottish sport.
- » Practical action to lift barriers to LGBT inclusion and to encourage greater LGBT participation in sport at all levels.
- » A better understanding of the issues relating to homophobia and transphobia in Scottish sport and what should be done to tackle the problem.

They are included here in summary form only, please see the full report for a comprehensive description of the recommendations.

## 1. **Visible Leadership**

The Scottish Government and the sports sector, which includes Scottish Governing Bodies (SGBs), Local Authorities, Clubs, Local Sports Councils, Leisure Trusts and Sport facility providers, should demonstrate visible leadership on the issue of homophobia and transphobia in Scottish sport, in order to tackle prejudice and encourage greater inclusion and participation of LGBT people.

A Scottish LGBT Sports Charter should be created to facilitate the full inclusion of LGBT people in Scottish sport.

SGBs of sport should visibly display support for LGBT participation in their sport (e.g. on official websites, social media, annual reports and through other publications).

There should be visible support from the sports sector and the Government for initiatives that tackle homophobia and transphobia in sport.

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## 2. **National Reference Group**

There should be a reference group established to coordinate the better inclusion of LGBT people and to combat homophobia and transphobia. Membership should include LGBT sector organisations, local authorities, (SGBs), **sportscotland** and other key stakeholders.

## 3. **Action Plan**

The new reference group should develop an Action Plan to tackle prejudice, and increase LGBT inclusion and participation in sport

## 4. **Policies**

Scottish Governing bodies of sport, and those delivering sport, should have clear, embedded and proportionate equality policies which make a positive difference for LGBT participants at all levels.

## 5. **Education**

Diversity training should be rolled out to ensure a greater understanding of the needs and issues of LGBT people, and to develop a more inclusive approach.

## 6. **Changing Attitudes**

There should be a public awareness campaign to tackle homophobic and transphobic prejudice, and encourage greater inclusion and participation of LGBT people in Scottish sport.

## 7. **Tackling abuse**

Homophobic and transphobic behaviour in Scottish sport should be actively and effectively challenged.

## 8. **Supporting LGBT Participation**

Sports bodies should provide support to encourage LGBT participation in sport.

Sports facility providers should be encouraged to publish or display information about the changing facilities within particular leisure facilities on their websites. This should include whether they have private cubicles or gender specific changing areas.

## 9. **Capacity Building**

LGBT Sports clubs should be developed and supported to deliver access to sport and sports programmes across Scotland.

## 10. **Employment**

SGBs should work with LGBT sector organisations to improve LGBT-friendly employment practices. This work should be supported by **sportscotland** and could be carried out in a proportional way aligned to the work that SGBs do through the Equality Standard for Sport.

# case study:

# trans swimming



## **Different Strokes: swimming sessions for transgender people**

Swimming sessions exclusively for trans people were held at Glenogle Swim Centre by the LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing in partnership with Edinburgh Leisure.

### **Background**

In January 2010, the LGBT Centre facilitated a consultation workshop with 19 transgender people in partnership with the STA, with the purpose of finding gaps in services and identifying support needs. One outcome was a call for transgender specific swimming opportunities. Edinburgh Leisure agreed to provide a session at Glenogle Swim Centre, specifically catering for the transgender community and closed to the general public. Importantly, they also committed staff time for the LGBT Centre to deliver preparatory transgender awareness training. This was designed to educate, break down barriers, dispel misconceptions, and provide a forum for staff to ask questions. The staff members at Glenogle were eager to contribute to the discussions and gave positive feedback afterwards.

### **The initiative**

The 'Different Strokes' trans specific swimming sessions launched in July 2010, and has taken place on a number of occasions since, twice monthly within quarterly sessions. Each session has been well attended with participants travelling from as far as Dumfries to take part. An LGBT Centre staff member is present at the beginning of each session to welcome attendees, receive feedback and check in with Glenogle staff. Robust engagement with the transgender community has allowed for effective promotion of the initiative.

### **The results**

Different Strokes filled a gap in the needs of the transgender community at relatively little cost. The sessions have produced a number of benefits, including the provision of a social opportunity and the promotion of physical activity.

The feedback demonstrates that the personal impact of the swimming for many members of the transgender community has been extremely powerful:

“For me being taught to swim at Glenogle, at the age of 56, is like being given a wonderful gift that turns out to be even more exciting and more life-changing than I had ever anticipated. Apart from the child-like joy of being in the water, it gives me a real sense of achievement and increases my self-esteem. I have had gender dysphoria all my life and so could never allow myself to wear a female swimming costume even as a child. I am now able to use a public swimming pool for the first time in my life in a safe, supportive environment where I can wear whatever feels comfortable to me. It is also very moving to be swimming in a group with other transgendered people, all of us enjoying together an activity which is so often inaccessible or unavailable to us.”

“I hadn’t been swimming for nearly 10 years and this helped me reconnect with the experience. It has improved my confidence and I’ve even managed to use some hotel pools. Without the trans swimming sessions, I couldn’t possibly have tried this.”

“It made a huge difference not having people staring at me and I felt a lot more confident and comfortable in my body. I’m going to try to make swimming a regular thing.”

“I used to swim all the time and even completed a Swimathon event for charity but felt I could not go swimming in a public pool owing to being in transition – MTF. The Glenogle sessions have been wonderful and I am so pleased to be swimming again. My feedback is 100% positive.”





The **Equality Network** is a charity that works for equality and human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland.

[www.equality-network.org](http://www.equality-network.org)



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