



**BRITISH LIBRARY**

**INTERNAL CONSULTATIONS**

**GENERAL GENDER, TRANSGENDER ,  
SEXUAL ORIENTATION,  
AND  
DOMESTIC ABUSE**

**MARCH AND APRIL 2010**

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**INTERNAL CONSULTATIONS RELATING TO GENDER,  
TRANSGENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND  
DOMESTIC ABUSE  
March and April 2010**

***Purpose of the consultation***

In 2007 the British Library held a very comprehensive consultation on gender and transgender areas, which involved surveys and focus groups for external and internal stakeholders. This consultation helped the Library to develop a Gender Equality Scheme and three year action plan for 2007 to 2010. In 2008 the library published its new Unified Generic Equality Scheme which brought together into one document the commitment to Equality across all the public duties (Disability, Gender and Race).

Since then, the Gender Action Group, and colleagues across the Library, have been working on implementing the Library's Action Plan, and widening the remit to include key areas such as transgender, domestic abuse and sexual orientation, which are key Library and national projects.

Now they wish to further involve people in the development of their new Action Plan from 2010-2013. The plan will affect employment policies and expectations for service accessibility and inclusiveness and will be implemented from May 2010.

The intention was to give both external and internal stakeholders (all men, women, and transgendered men and women whatever their sexual orientation) the opportunity to raise areas that they would like the Library to consider.

This particular report is on the internal employee consultation. A companion report focuses on external stakeholder feedback.

***Internal Consultation process***

Employees at Boston Spa and London sites were invited to take part in this consultation.

The focus groups were facilitated by the Library's host consultant, (who supported the Library during the original consultation) and a consultant expert in LGBT areas and identifies as LGBT.

Four employee focus groups were held:

25<sup>th</sup> March at Boston Spa

12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> April at St Pancras

### ***Confidentiality***

The groups agreed to keep the content confidential. The results of the focus groups were to be recorded, summarised and shared at a high level with no comments attributed to the contributor. They would be viewable on the website as before, with good and bad points raised.

### ***Setting the scene***

It was explained that this was the second consultation on gender and transgender issues. A similar consultation three years ago involved comprehensive consultations, online questionnaires and focus groups and had a wealth of response. The Library was still benefiting from this and the progress made, and it had helped focus the topics and areas for this consultation. .

The purpose of this consultation was to review how the Library and the Gender Action Group had progressed the actions and to explore what needs to be done over the next 3 years. This included consideration of current Library projects in:

- transgender areas and development of a policy
- domestic abuse – the Library has developed a policy which is under discussion and would like to support employees who may be experiencing domestic abuse, and managers to assist their employees where appropriate
- sexual orientation – the Library is developing a policy and an action plan for this area.

This is an opportune time to develop the next three year plans and to build on the actions of the past 3 years. The Library recognises that concrete plans are needed for projects.

## ***The report***

This report comprises an account of the issues discussed at both the Boston Spa and St Pancras focus groups:

- general gender issues
- transgender issues
- sexual orientation
- domestic abuse

## ***Summary of key areas raised for consideration by participants at Boston Spa and St Pancras***

### **1 General gender areas for consideration**

#### **Training**

- **On-line equality training positives:**
  - interesting and thought provoking
  - You can return to re-address the areas and try again until you get it right
  - it gives a basic awareness and a chance to discuss topics with colleagues
- **On-line equality training negatives:**
  - face-to-face training would be better as staff can interact / ask questions
  - after the training, there is no follow up
  - it would be beneficial if there was an opportunity to look deeper into things you didn't understand
  - one person felt that it wasn't effective at all
  - some sort of printed information to support the training would be helpful

#### **Flexitime and annual leave**

- There would be concern if some staff had more flexibility around child care e.g. if BL introduced term time contracts as childless staff are then deluged with work during school holidays which is not always balanced fairly or the impact on those still at work considered.
- The Library flexible working hours scheme is good, but it would be better if it was applied to all grades

- Managers may give those staff with children first refusal of dates during school holidays for annual leave. Childless staff may be asked to change leave dates so that staff with children can take leave during school holidays; it happens to gay single people too. Managers need to be mindful that everyone has family, even if childless and they still have commitments to consider.

### Other issues

- It was felt that internal communications work well to promote gender equality but that this is competing with a lot of other information. Staff felt bombarded with information
- It was also felt there needed to be more awareness of Gender Equality and how it affects everyone
- There is a perception that 'equal pay' could be an issue, but statistics suggest that actually there isn't an issue
- The question was asked as to whether pensions could be affected by childcare responsibilities

## 2. Transgender areas for consideration

### Support

#### It was felt that:

- If someone goes to their manager regarding considering or undergoing a gender change, they should be asked what they need from the organisation, because everyone has different needs
- They need to be offered more than just time off when it comes to support. Staff need a contact for support or discussion and to have somewhere to go as a refuge
- What the Library is doing around transgender issues is hugely empowering

### Training

- Transgender awareness training for all staff is seen as particularly important

### Other issues

- Does the Library monitor career development to ensure that there is no discrimination with respect to diversity issues
- Transition can be a traumatic experience, e.g. if the person is unable to fund the surgery or is often being harassed, this can affect mental health. Mental health is considered by doctors when assessing for surgery and if it is in question, then they can not proceed. This can become a vicious circle
- Questions arose around which toilet should be used at what stage of the gender transition – a suggested best option was to provide Unisex accessible toilets

### **3. Sexual orientation areas for consideration**

#### **Reactions to the Library's approach to LGBT issues**

- As an organisation, the British Library is perceived as “pretty liberal”
- There is a lack of information on LGBT areas, with Boston Spa participants feeling that issues were better recognised and promoted in the South e.g. International Women's Day was being celebrated in London but not in Boston Spa. It is hard to get North and South staff together to discuss the same issues
- The LBGT month on the intranet was impressive
- Many people have worked for the Library in Boston Spa for a long time and are resistant to change, but generally all staff work together and accept each person for what they are
- The Library needs to take care to ensure that LGBT areas are presented not just in a sexual context but more broadly

#### **Support**

##### **It was felt that:**

- In the North it would be easy for LGBT employees to be out with their sexuality, due to the happy working environment and colleagues being laid back. This was slightly less shared by those in the South although no one actually said that they had not felt able to come out at work

- It could help someone to come out at work if they were able to talk to another gay employee
- There was a resistance to promotion of LGBT staff
- Issues had been handled appropriately but that more work was needed if the Library is to be proactive in this area
- People who feel they have been discriminated against could be concerned about 'rocking the boat'. Line managers may take the approach 'you have taken it the wrong way' where a service user is said to have offended a staff member. Dealing with issues effectively may depend on the grade and abilities of the person dealing with the situation
- One person found HR very supportive when faced with abuse over their sexual orientation

### Working at the Library

- This varied from the north , where it was felt easy for employees to be out with their sexuality, to the South where some felt that there are barriers to this topic, with some people not being happy with it - perhaps due to lack of awareness rather than dislike
- Holiday seasons and leave were mooted as an issue. e.g. at Christmas, some experienced an assumption that because of being LGBT and being childless that they are available to work – LG staff have been asked to change holidays to accommodate those with children or those with children have been given preferential treatment when leave requests are put in.
- Not all agreed that the Library effectively communicates to the workforce that it is not permissible to discriminate against colleagues or service users on the basis of sexual orientation
- It was felt that the Library's communication around sexual orientation / anti-gay bullying had been better in recent years because communication has increased. However sexual orientation is not covered in the staff handbook and should be
- It was felt there was a North/South divide regarding the Library sites, and care should be taken to open up both the LGBT social group and the action group to staff at both sites

## Training

- Staff at both sites felt face-to-face training would be more effective and engaging than on-line training
- Training needs to include raising staff awareness as to why people are gay, lesbian, trans. It is not a lifestyle choice, but 'who we are'
- In the Asian community there is an LGBT stigma, and targeting the issue in smaller groups may be an appropriate tactic. Colleagues from backgrounds where homosexuality is illegal need more focused awareness training
- Two additional training methods were suggested: an equality conference, and a 'Wellbeing' day to explore diversity at the British Library, with workshops (*The Library has already organised a Equality and Learning at Work Day at each site in May to June 2010*)
- The Library needs to decide whether training on all strands of diversity should be compulsory, like it is on the E on line training. It was felt that people with negative attitudes wouldn't take part in optional training

## Ensuring that service users are made aware that anti LGBT discrimination is not acceptable at the Library

- The Library needs to consider that whilst readers sign terms and conditions about treating people with respect, when service users get frustrated, human nature comes out. Being explicit about respect to LGBT employees would be good, and prominent signage should be displayed in public areas, stating that the Library expects all of its staff to be treated with respect
- Training on dealing with difficult situations including LGBT examples would be good, and this training should start at the top of the organisation

## Taking the consultation on sexual orientation forward

- There is a need to make the subject more visible – people are likely to be more interested if the communication was improved
- Any problems could be raised if there were an Action Group to whom people could take personal or work *problems* (*The Library has organised a Sexual Orientation Action Sub-Group*)
- The intranet could be utilised to give details of who to contact if someone has a diversity issue

- Monitoring, and the reason for monitoring around sexual orientation, could be better communicated. If questions around sexual orientation etc. were put into context, people would be more likely to answer them
- Trade unions could help by reassuring members that the Library's reason for asking people to declare their LGBT status is so that they can positively address any LGBT issues
- The consultation should be ongoing rather than restricted to every 3 years – hold more regular focus groups
- The Library needs to promote a culture that intolerance towards diversity issues will not be tolerated

### Other issues

- The Library at Boston Spa does not currently market its services to LGBT groups etc, encouraging them to visit the Library (most local LGBT organisations are in Leeds and York). Open days are not seen by the Library as being core to business at this remote site. Could open days be re-instated so that people could come and learn about the Library and its diversity?

### How to increase the number of people taking part in focus groups

- By management encouraging staff to attend consultations – it has to come from the top
- Scoring staff highly on their PMR if they participate in focus groups
- More awareness before the meetings about the content and how the focus group is not just for staff who identify as LGBT, but for anyone who is interested in diversity issues
- Staff may feel that assumptions will be made that if they attend one of these focus groups, they must identify as LGBT

## 4. Domestic abuse areas for consideration

### Support

- Support mechanisms need to be in place for staff experiencing domestic abuse. In the North, support groups are hard to access as they are likely to be in larger towns
- Systems are needed to prevent an abuser gaining access to an employee by entering the building or by phone.
- Should the abuser also be an employee, what can the Library do to protect the abused?

### Training

- Training is important on dealing with domestic abuse issues:
  - Staff may be seeing the affect of bullying on a colleague and not know what to do
  - Line managers may need to support staff in their team and need to know how far they can go/how best to provide support
  - the perpetrators also need support and counselling to help them to understand that their behaviour is not acceptable

### Support

- With the Library's counselling/advisory service, some staff may worry about lost confidentiality if they are seen going into a counsellor's room. Perhaps the room used could be rotated each week so it is not immediately identified by all as 'the counsellor's room'
- Perhaps the Library could develop external partnerships e.g. with care trusts, where staff could go for counselling outside the office
- It was seen as important to promote sources of help and guidance on the intranet

### Other issues

- An example was given of a university having a 'safe room' with a couch, some food and a lock, where someone could go to if they felt at risk. Was this something that the Library could provide?