

Below are some positive examples of action staff can take in specific circumstances. There are, of course, different and equally constructive ways to deal with situations, these are just examples that offer some guidance.

Scenario 1

Terri is 17 and studies sports science at a college of further education. She changed her gender identity from male to female two months ago. She is currently having hormone treatment and plans to have sexual reassignment surgery in the near future. Terri says her transition is a permanent one.

On returning to college after the summer break, she needs to use the facilities that are consistent with her gender (i.e. the female toilets and changing rooms). Other learners are surprised and some confront Terri aggressively. Sue, the tutor, suggests that Terri uses the facility for people that have a disability. Terri leaves the site and says she does not want to return.

You are the curriculum leader. What would you do?

Firstly, as long as you have established that Terri's transition is permanent, she is legally entitled to use the facilities consistent with her gender identity (i.e. the female facilities).

The reaction of the learners may have been inappropriate but perhaps not entirely unexpected as they may not have understood the reasons for the change. Assuming staff knew about Terri's circumstances, some awareness raising work should have been done with learners to minimise the risk of any problems.

In this situation it is worth noting the following points:-

- All public sector organisations have a duty to promote equality in this area, not just prevent discrimination
- In many situations it is unlikely there is a 'one solution fits all' outcome. It will often be necessary to consult the individual concerned to see what they would like to happen
- Terri is likely to be distressed and may need further support so appropriate signposting is vital here
- The college might look at privacy levels in existing facilities to see if this is an issue. Are cubicles 'floor-to-ceiling'? Can more privacy be granted as part of a 'reasonable adjustment' programme.

Scenario 2

Simon has just started a work-based training programme. The work-based element of the course is within the admin office of a local construction company. People in the office there think Simon is gay based on the way he talks and acts. They make comments such as 'queer boy'. Simon actually has a girlfriend but is too scared to draw any more attention to himself.

You are the work-based assessor. You do an on-site visit and witness some of this behaviour from members of the admin team. They seem to be making a joke out of it and even try to make their name-calling affectionate by putting an arm round Simon as they tease him.

You know Simon desperately wants to fit in. He looks uncomfortable but you don't want to make the situation worse for him or damage relations with the employer unnecessarily.

What would you do?

Regardless of the level of the intent by the office workers, their behaviour is inappropriate. Simon has legal protection because of actual or perceived sexual orientation. It would be up to you to take swift action. Unless an immediate solution can be found Simon should be removed from the environment and placed elsewhere. His welfare and the level of support you provide is priority here.

Assuming Simon is suitably placed elsewhere, links with the employer need not be severed. You should work with them to raise awareness of what is expected of an employer in terms of equality and diversity. Of course, it would be good practice to engage employers on E&D before learners are placed. This dialogue would reinforce expectations and responsibilities.

Scenario 3

Paul is a project manager within a voluntary and community provider of education. Walking through one of the social spaces he hears someone in a crowd use homophobic language along the lines of, “that’s rubbish, stop being so gay!” and, “stop being such a fag!”

Paul asks the individual, Sally, if he can have a quick word. When they have found a quiet space he explains why he has taken her aside. She says that she can call herself and her friend (who is also gay) whatever she likes as she isn’t causing offence....

What would you do?

Paul does the right thing by taking Sally aside rather than risking a confrontation in front of her peers. Good practice here would be to say that you understand Sally’s reasons for using such language but not everyone may understand her motivations. Paul should explain the person on the receiving end of the comments may not be as comfortable with the use of language as Sally believes. Also, the comments were particularly loud and could cause offence and be intimidating to anyone that hears them. Paul could also say that a homophobic person could be listening and that he/ she could then use this language to hurt someone else who may not be as confident as and her friend Sally are.

Put yourself in the shoes of another learner that is stood in the same group. They are questioning their own sexuality and terrified about other people finding out and how they will react. How would they feel being next to Sally when such language is being used?

Scenario 4

Your colleague Elaine says she was approached by a learner called Anila (who is 16) who wanted to talk after a lesson. Anila says that she is fairly sure that she is gay. Her friends already know but now she wants to talk to her parents about it. She thinks they will be supportive and they might already be aware. Elaine decides that rather than give Anila some prescriptive guidance she will send her to the college counsellor.

Did Elaine do the right thing?

Elaine may well have been right by assuming that Anila needed to talk her situation through with someone else, but the counsellor may not necessarily be the right person. This might not be the type of support or environment that Anila needs.

Good practice here would have been to talk to Anila in more depth to establish what her needs are. It may have been more appropriate to signpost her to an LGBT Youth Group, but it is important to ensure any environment is safe and suitable for the individual concerned.

Elaine could also have sought guidance from a colleague with an equality remit, or perhaps from a member of staff that is openly gay and a positive role model.

As a wider issue in the organisation, it would be good practice to see what kind of guidance is readily available to young LGBT or 'questioning' learners. Not all learners will have the confidence to approach a tutor as Anila did.

Scenario 5

Jim is an IT Facilitator in a Community Centre. He is trying to embed equality in his delivery but is struggling to come up with ways of doing this for LGBT themes within his course content. He approaches you and asks for suggestions.

What examples could you give to help Jim?

Suggestions could include:-

- Within spreadsheet work you could do some exercises around demography and the proportion of the population that is estimated to be LGBT (e.g. fill in the missing cells)
- A research exercise could be undertaken in terms of how useful on-line content is in supporting LGBT equality
- Regarding background information on the history of computer technology you could tell the story of Alan Turing who was an English mathematician, wartime code-breaker and pioneer of computer science. In 1952 Alan was arrested and tried for 'homosexuality', then a criminal offence. To avoid prison he accepted injections of oestrogen to curb his libido. His security clearance was withdrawn meaning he could no longer work for GCHQ, the successor to Bletchley Park. He committed suicide in 1954 by biting into an apple laced with cyanide. Legend has it that the computer company Apple Inc. introduced their logo to honour Alan. The 'Apple' even used to be rainbow coloured, a symbol of LGBT equality world-wide. A great story (though to this day unverified by Apple!).

Scenario 6

Jayne has been delivering an equality module for a higher education business programme. She would like to set a paper for the learners' private study on an LGBT theme. She cannot think of a title for the paper.

Would you be able to help her?

There are lots of titles that could be chosen. Jayne could invent one or seek inspiration on-line. Here is one option based on an article in the recruitment section of a local daily paper.

“Lesbians believe they have to disguise their sexuality or risk being overlooked at job interviews, according to a recent study. Research found that gay women thought they would have little chance of getting a job if they dressed as they really wanted to during an interview”.

The learners could be asked to produce a response and include the following:-

- Reasons why an individual might decide to hide their sexuality
- If the research findings are true, what impact this has on (1) The individual, and (2) The organisation
- What businesses could do to improve their approach and become more LGBT-friendly

Can you think of any more scenarios, maybe from personal experiences? Why not share them with colleagues? This will help them generate ideas to embed LGBT equality in their work.