

A Voice within the CWU

Lesbians, gay men and bisexual people form a substantial section of CWU members. And, as union members, they must receive equal rights and protection. Lesbian and gay 'invisibility' means this doesn't always happen. They remain discriminated against, victimised, unprotected by employment law and attacked by government legislation.

The CWU Lesbian and Gay Advisory Committee exists to provide a voice within our union for lesbians and gay men. It is here to support their rights, to raise awareness of issues affecting lesbians and gays, to end discrimination and provide union protection. In short, the aim is to achieve equal rights for all our members.

Lesbian and Gay Rights at work

A trade union issue

Lesbian, gay and bisexual workers are often not open about their sexuality at work because they fear harassment and discrimination.

The law now protects people against discrimination at work on the grounds of sexual orientation. It does not protect people against discrimination outside work.

Remember, fighting discrimination at work is everybody's business, not just a task for those affected by it.

Employers will often manipulate prejudice to distract and divide employees. Anything that weakens solidarity between workers can be to an employer's advantage.

The law is never enough, we need to promote a climate of tolerance and respect for difference.

www.cwu.org

You can contact a member of the LGAC through the CWU Equality Department.

Get in touch with Michele Emerson or Al Crisp at CWU, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1RX.

020 8971 7238 or 020 8971 7205

memerson@cwu.org or acrisp@cwu.org

www.cwu.org/lgachome.htm



Published by the Communication Workers Union
150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1RX
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The union stands ready to defend members who face harassment or discrimination at work because of their sexuality





Discrimination

Many lesbians, gay men and bisexual people are victimised both at work and outside it. The discrimination they face every day is the result of being considered 'not normal'. But often what is considered 'normal' is a stereotype, far from the reality of most people's lives. For instance, a 'normal' family is often portrayed as consisting of a father as breadwinner with a mother at home looking after children: only three per cent of homes are like that in the real world.



Equal Needs

The needs of lesbians and gay men are the same as those of other workers and union members. They need job security, decent working conditions and a working environment free from harassment and fear. However, their experience is often that their sexuality, if known, becomes for many people a 'defining characteristic' and the focus of hatred and ridicule.

Why all the fuss?

Who gains from prejudice and fear? Certainly it is not those of us who work in an atmosphere of hatred or ridicule. When people we work with are treated unjustly, we all lose.



Coming Out

"We don't have any lesbians or gays where I work"

Discrimination against lesbians, gays and bisexual people means many feel unable to be open about their sexuality. They may keep quiet about relationships, or invent fictitious 'straight' ones. So the problems they face often go unrecognised.

Many CWU members may think they don't know any lesbian, gay or bisexual colleagues, when the reality is that they know people who don't feel able to 'come out', to be open as lesbians, gays or bisexual to themselves and to other people.

For lesbians, gays and bisexual people, the workplace can mean tremendous stress: lying about yourself to your work-mates, laughing at hateful anti-gay jokes and always worrying about being found out.

'Coming Out' helps to break down prejudices and stereotypes, as people realise that lesbians, gay and bisexual people are workers just like anyone else.

Of course, no-one should be forced to come out. It is up to an individual to decide when or how to tell other people about their sexuality.

The CWU Lesbian and Gay Advisory Committee believes that by fighting against discrimination and by the union taking lesbian and gay rights seriously, we can make it easier for CWU members to be 'out'.

Every union member can help by providing a supportive atmosphere for lesbian, gay and bisexual colleagues.