

# LGBTQIA+ Diversity and Inclusion in Animal Care



## Pride 2023



BRITISH & IRISH ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

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# What, How, Why?

## **What is equality and diversity?**

Equality is about providing equal opportunities to everyone and protecting people against all forms of discrimination, while diversity refers to recognising and celebrating that everyone is different and respecting our differences.

## **How can we encourage equality and diversity?**

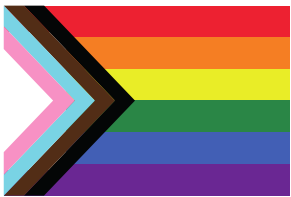
Striving for inclusivity is essential to encouraging equality and diversity by ensuring that each individual can feel valued and included within their community, whether it be their workplace, classroom, where they live, and so forth. Providing all people with fair and equal opportunities to have the best possible chance to succeed, regardless of their background, is fundamental to achieving equality. This sometimes means we have to do specific things for different groups to ensure everyone has the opportunity to achieve the same outcomes.

## **Why is equality and diversity important?**

Good equality and diversity practice means that everyone has fair and accessible access to services, and are happy and motivated at work or at school. They ensure that all people are treated as equals worthy of dignity and respect, and that their differences are celebrated and their voices heard. Diversity brings in new experiences and ideas, allowing people to learn from each other and promote compassion and creativity.



# Diversity in romantic and sexual orientation



## Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation refers to a wide variety of romantic and sexual preferences including straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, and all other forms of sexual orientation.

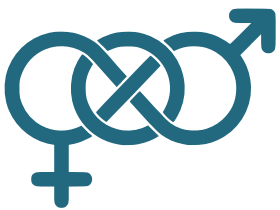
There are many different forms of romantic and sexual orientations that people may identify with. A person may have a particular label they use to describe their romantic and sexual preferences, or they may not want to use a label at all.

**Romantic orientation** refers to the type of person someone wants to form emotional romantic relationships with, and may or may not align with their sexual orientation. For example, someone may be heteroromantic (romantically attracted to people of the opposite gender to themselves) and also identify as asexual (do not experience sexual attraction).

**Sexual orientation** refers to the type of person someone wants to form intimate relationships with, but may also refer to emotional romantic connection as well for those who do not identify on the [aromantic](#) spectrum.

Romantic and sexual orientation is [complex, fluid, and can change](#) throughout a person's life as they experience different types of relationships and meet different types of people. It is important to never make assumptions about people's orientation and preferences and communicate respectfully.

# Sex and gender diversity



## Sex and gender diversity

Sex and gender diversity refers to people of all genders, including cisgender, transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and all other forms of gender identity and expression.

Gender identity is a person's individual and internal experience of their gender. It is that individual person's sense of being a man, a woman, some combination of both, or neither, and may not necessarily align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Check out the [genderbread](#) resource for more information.

**Gender identity** refers to the individual's perception of their gender; how they internally "feel" about their gender. Generally, a person's gender identity is expressed through elements of communication such as the name, terminology, and pronouns they prefer to be referred by.

**Gender expression** refers to an individual's outward expression of their gender, such as in how they style their hair or the clothes they choose to wear. It may not necessarily align with traditional views of what a particular gender is "supposed" to look like. Check out this [animation on gender expression](#).

The best thing to do is to ask people how they prefer to be referred and what they are comfortable with in terms of language. It is essential that we are never invasive or judgemental regarding people's bodies and this is important when we talk about gender, too.



A photograph of two people, likely of South Asian descent, smiling and looking upwards. They are holding a large rainbow flag, which is draped over their shoulders. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an outdoor setting at night or in low light. The text 'Specific challenges and solutions' is overlaid in white on a dark rectangular background.

# Specific challenges and solutions

## Specific challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ staff

The challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ staff working in zoos and aquariums are much the same as working in any other organisation. It is important to consider what the challenges might be when, for example, staff are interacting with the public, with colleagues they do not interact with often, or logistical issues concerning upper management or conflict with policies.

This is not an exhaustive list of all of the challenges that LGBTQIA+ staff face at work, and it is important to remember that all individuals will face their own challenges as a result of the intersection of all aspects of their identity. The best you can do for all staff is be open, communicative, and foster a space where all colleagues feel safe and able to talk about the challenges they face and work together to find compassionate solutions.

### Uniform policies

Uniform policies may differentiate between what is appropriate for men and for women. Avoid differentiating and instate rules that are applicable to everyone and allow non-conformance to gender roles; e.g. instead of "men should have tidy facial hair", say "facial hair should be kept tidy"; instead of "women should wear skirts at a specific length", say "skirts should be worn at a specific length". Where safe and appropriate, allow freedom for individual expression.



# Specific challenges and solutions

**LGBT staff may choose not to be open about their gender or sexual orientation to some or all of their colleagues**

Staff may choose not to be open due to fears of discrimination or harassment, or simply a personal choice. It is important to create a space where staff can feel safe to be open about who they are, but also ensure that no one is pressured to come out before they are ready. Coming out can be an ongoing process and it is important to make sure you respect the autonomy of LGBTQIA+ people to choose who they want to come out to, when they tell them, and how they find out.

**Genderdiverse staff in public facing roles may have challenges talking and communicating with visitors**

Staff may not want to be open to visitors for fear of harassment, and may have to deal with regular misgendering from visitors who are unaware of their identity. Encouraging all staff to wear pronoun badges helps individual staff feel safe while giving them an easy method of communicating their preferences.

**Leave may be required from work due to parental obligations or for specific healthcare needs**

Treat LGBTQIA+ staff as you would opposite-sex parents or cisgender individuals with regards to leave for family or health purposes. [Gender-affirming healthcare](#) to treat gender dysphoria is the same as receiving treatment for any other condition. Remember to be kind and respectful and allow all people time away from work that they need for family and for health.



A person is seen from the side, holding a large rainbow flag. The flag's colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) are visible. The person has dark hair and is wearing a dark top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

# Creating systematic strategies for inclusivity

## Building organisational strategies

Having a written equality, diversity, and inclusion strategy is a good idea to demonstrate that organisational commitment towards being a diverse facility is being taken seriously, encourages others to treat others equally, and provides accountability. These should be written in collaboration with the lived experiences of a diverse range of staff members and points may include...

- ✓ Implement a strategy for continuous improvement in managing diversity and developing a culture of inclusion
- ✓ Develop a strategy together with the lived experience of LGBT staff that includes all areas of education, research, and conservation
- ✓ Be aware of and take into account local legislation, cultural norms, and social issues, at home, and in other countries your organisation works in
- ✓ Train all members of staff in equality, diversity, and inclusion and encourage engagement in all areas of their job role
- ✓ Introduce mechanisms to deal with all forms of discrimination and be transparent and accountable with how discrimination is dealt with
- ✓ Develop an open and compassionate culture with good communication channels based on open dialogue, active listening, and respect.

# Strategies for LGBT diversity and inclusivity



## **Consider workplace policies**

Provide benefits and leave policies (such as parental leave, medical leave for transition purposes, etc.) that support LGBT employees and their families, such as health insurance for same-sex partners and gender-inclusive family leave.



## **Provide ongoing training and support**

Offer sensitivity and inclusion training for all staff to raise awareness of the issues impacting LGBT colleagues and provide supportive, compassionate skills to ensure all can work together with empathy and kindness.



## **Work to prevent all discrimination**

Ensure there are clear procedures for reporting and addressing discrimination complaints, and take all reports seriously. Respond swiftly to enforce policies and ensure your workplace is safe and compassionate for all.



## **Foster communities of people**

Establish LGBTQIA+ employee resource groups where LGBT staff and allies can connect, support one another, and advise leadership. Increase LGBT representation in leadership roles to act as role models and mentors to junior LGBT staff.





# Additional areas to consider in strategies

## What might you need to consider?

Many of the ways we can help LGBTQIA+ staff feel included and respected at work are simple, compassionate steps we can take by simply being respectful and attentive to individual needs. However, there are some more systematic ideas you might need to think about.

For example...

- **Infrastructure** - Some people may need or prefer to use gender neutral bathrooms or changing areas, while others may need or prefer to use the single-gender facility that applies to them.
- **Travel arrangements** - If you conduct any activities abroad, such as conservation work or outreach, you will need to be aware that not all countries are progressive about LGBTQIA+ rights and may present a safety risk. Make sure you have systems in place for keeping staff safe when they travel and conduct thorough risk assessments on a case by case basis.
- **Organisational commitment** - How are you making your commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusion clear? What are you doing to be an **active ally** and ensure your actions aren't performative? Pride month is a great time to demonstrate your commitment through raising the voices of LGBTQIA+ colleagues and providing a platform to showcase the work you are doing, but make sure you aren't just "**rainbow washing**" for one month of the year - be an active ally to LGBTQIA+ staff and visitors year-round.



# Tips for being an LGBT ally at work

## What can you do every day to support LGBT staff?

### Use inclusive language

Avoid gendered terms like "ladies and gentlemen" and use "everyone" or similar plural terms instead. This also includes not making assumptions such as walking into a room and addressing everyone as "ladies", or asking someone about a specific-gendered partner when you don't know if their partner is male, female, or identify as another gender. Default to using gender neutral pronouns such as singular "they/them" when you don't know for certain.

### Advertise your pronouns

Even if you believe your pronouns should be "obvious" to others, you can do a lot to make genderdiverse colleagues feel safe by sharing your pronouns when you introduce yourself, including them in e-mail signatures, or wearing a pronouns badge. Advertising your pronouns helps transgender and gender nonconforming individuals feel "normal" when they share their own, so they can express their preferences without fear of being judged or singled out.

### Be an ally to your LGBT colleagues

Speak out against jokes, slurs, or gossip in the moment and help to shift social norms in your environment towards being respectful and compassionate to all other people. This also includes respectfully correcting others when you hear someone use the wrong name or pronouns for an LGBT coworker when said coworker is not around. Allow people to speak for themselves, but help to raise their voice and support marginalised identities through active allyship.





# Inclusive language

## What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is the use of words and phrases that avoid biases, slang, and expressions that might discriminate against groups of people based on their identity. When you use inclusive language, you help to create an environment where people feel like they belong and can be their true, authentic selves.

A key example is using gender neutral language, such as using "they/them" pronouns - e.g. "when an animal caregiver is respected, they feel at their best at work" - or using "everyone" instead of "guys" when addressing groups. This also helps to make it normalised to talk in a neutral, inclusive way. For example, using the term "partner" to refer to same-sex partners is just as normal in the modern day as using it for opposite-sex partners.

## Educate yourself on respectful terminology

As society becomes more accepting and respectful of LGBTQIA+ identities, progression also includes re-examining the type of language we use. Terms that may have been "normal" to use ten years ago may now be seen as disrespectful or discriminatory, so it is important to make sure you know what terminology is acceptable to use in the modern day and continuously educate yourself.

Check out the [GLAAD media reference](#) guide for a resource on terms to use and terms to avoid to be respectful and kind when talking about LGBTQIA+ people and identities. If in doubt about any terminology, do your research and ask people who are knowledgeable.



# Transitioning while at work

## Supporting transgender staff during their transitions

Transition includes two stages, and people may pursue one, both, or neither:

**Social transition** - The process of telling other people about their gender identity, including changing name, pronouns, social gendered role, and so forth.

**Medical transition** - The process of receiving medical treatment, such as hormones and/or surgeries, with the aim of overcoming gender dysphoria.

An individual is no more or less transgender because they do or do not choose to pursue either of these options. While not all transgender and gender nonconforming staff will seek to transition, many do and will need support from their colleagues and workplaces while they do so:

- Assistance with providing documents demonstrating evidence that an individual has changed their gender identity at work
- Time off work for medical appointments, blood tests, hormone treatments, surgeries, or other specific forms of healthcare
- Support communicating to other members of staff or members of the public about their gender transition

Ultimately, transitioning staff should be treated with patience, kindness, and compassion to ensure they are comfortable and happy at work as they undergo these changes.



# Equality, diversity, and inclusion resources

## Resources for LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

[Stonewall best practices, toolkits, and guidelines](#) are available for free online for educators at all levels, covering topics within LGBTQIA+ inclusion including anti-bullying and legal advice.

The [Stonewall safe travels guide](#) is a resource designed to provide guidance and support for staff required to travel abroad for work, with respect to the individual challenges LGBTQIA+ individuals and the challenges they may face when travelling to countries that may present risks.

[Workplace pride](#) is a non-profit organisation working to support LGBTQIA+ staff in all types of workplaces, and produces a variety of resources including toolkits and guidelines for LGBT-inclusive workspaces.

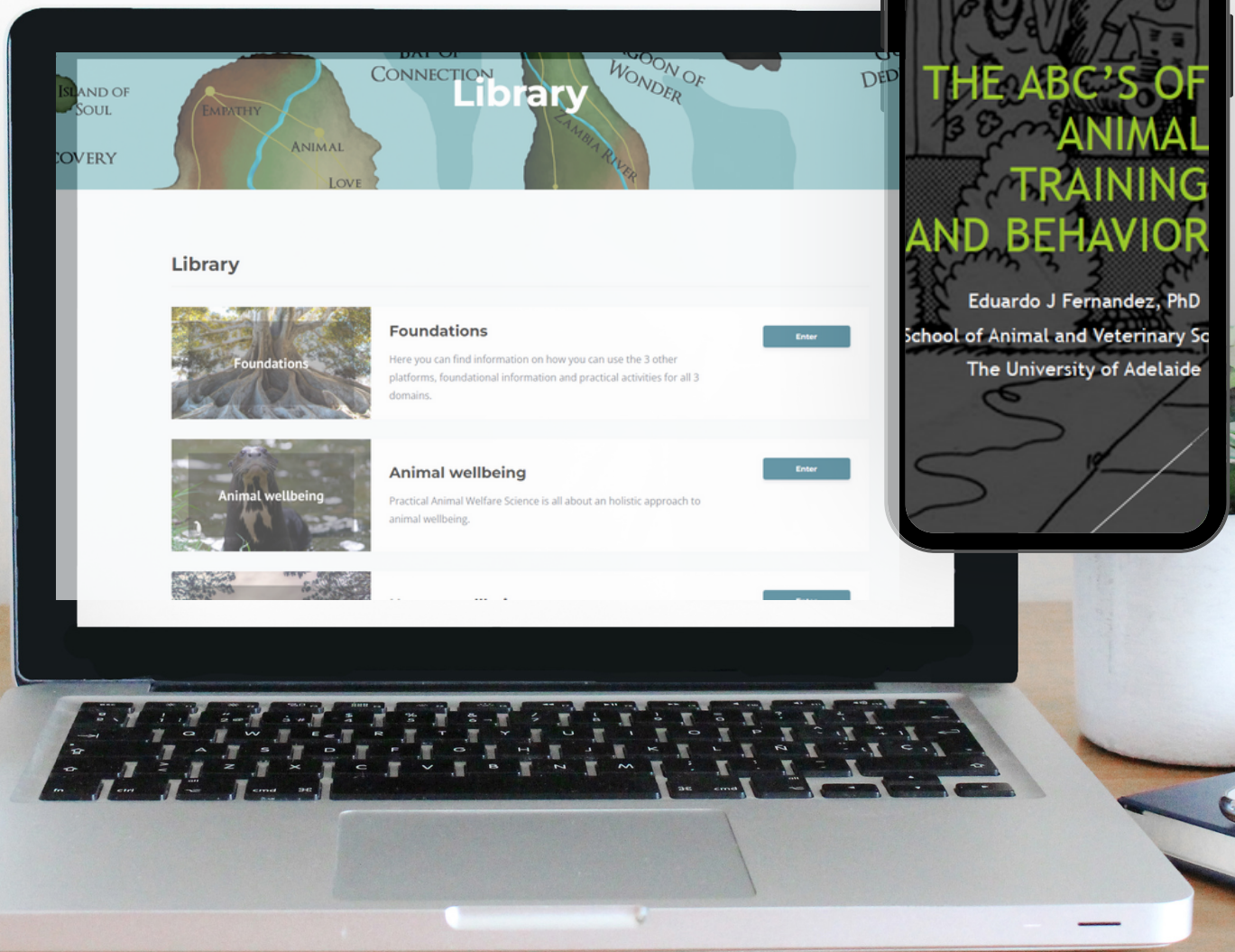
[The Gender Unicorn](#) is a resource designed to help individuals express who they are in terms of gender identity and expression, with respect to non-western ideas of gender such as two-spirit.

We hope this resource is helpful for you as an individual or as an organisation in thinking about how you can foster diverse and inclusive spaces for LGBTQIA+ staff and students.

We would like to thank the creators of all linked resources for sharing their work for all to learn and grow from.

# RESOURCES AVAILABLE ANY TIME, ANY WHERE, AT YOUR OWN PACE

Live and recorded webinars, downloadable tools and resources, science into practice & case studies, connect to the community - all on your phone, laptop, or other devices, whenever you want, wherever you want





# EXPLORE INTERBEING

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