22,000 international students studying in the UK are likely to be lesbian, gay or bisexual (using Home Office calculations).

76 countries around the world still prosecute people because they are lesbian, gay or bisexual, including five countries which still have the death penalty for same-sex activity.

Some of your international students may be lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). Some students may come from areas with negative attitudes towards LGB people. Make sure that support staff, academics and recruitment staff support all international students by tackling homophobia.

**What is homophobia?**

Homophobia is a range of negative attitudes and feelings towards lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people.

Homophobic behaviour can include:

- physical or sexual attack
- written abuse, such as graffiti
- verbal abuse
- using phrases like ‘that’s so gay’ to mean something is ‘rubbish’ or negative
- jokes or banter at the expense of LGB people
- referring to a person’s sexuality when it isn’t relevant

The law protects staff and students against discrimination based on sexual orientation, including perceived sexual orientation and association with LGB people. Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is as serious as that based on any other protected characteristic such as disability, gender and race.
What can we do to make our service more inclusive?

- Encourage your institution to help all students be aware of their rights and responsibilities. All new students should be required to accept and agree to follow the university’s harassment and dignity policies.
- Display signs that state your service does not tolerate homophobic bullying or harassment.
- Publicise how staff and students can report homophobic behaviour.
- Provide all students with information on where they can turn to for support.
- Display posters about networks and activities for LGB students. If you provide information on facilities and nightlife in the area, make sure you include LGB events and clubs.
- Before talking about someone’s sexuality, reflect on whether it is important or relevant to the discussion. If you do, avoid the term ‘homosexual’ as it can be seen as negative.

Your institution will have somebody who is responsible for equality and diversity training and policies. They should be able to help you put these measures in place.

Can religious views or beliefs be a basis for discriminating against LGB people?

- Students have a right to freedom of expression of religion, but only if it does not result in unlawful discrimination and harassment of other people.

How can we let LGB students know about their rights if we don’t know who they are?

- Many students will not want to reveal their sexuality to staff, but by including information in induction packs, or displaying information on notice boards, websites and student intranets about the opportunities, facilities and support mechanisms available for LGB students, those who wish to find out more information can do so without revealing their sexuality.

Will we offend students from countries that do not have lesbian, gay and bisexual rights by being openly gay-friendly?

- A report by Lifelong Learning UK showed that the majority of international students welcome the diversity of people at UK higher education institutions.

Your institution will have policies that protect the rights and dignity of LGB people.

Homophobic behaviour might not always be recognised as being discriminatory, or even be noticed, by some people. The behaviour may have been deemed acceptable or unchallenged in previous environments such as schools and homes.

Publicise support groups that exist to support religious LGB students, such as Imaan (www.imaan.org.uk) which supports LGB Muslims, and the Christian Network (www.gaychristians.org.uk) or the LGB Christian Movement (www.lgcm.org.uk)

Encourage your institution to help all students be aware of their rights and responsibilities. All new students should be required to accept and agree to follow the university’s harassment and dignity policies.

Don’t assume that students coming from countries where homosexuality is taboo or disapproved of will be homophobic.

Your institution will have somebody who is responsible for equality and diversity training and policies. They should be able to help you put these measures in place.

Equality Challenge Unit promotes equality and diversity in higher education.

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