‘Understanding and Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT+) Students’ – resource guide to accompany the online training

This resource guide includes: the video script used in the training (produced by the SU and LGBT+ Committee); the graphics used in the video; information about the help and support available in the University and in the Students’ Union; other local support groups and general resources; and the questions and scenario used in the course. As with the online course, this guide includes links to useful web pages within the main body of the text. You can go straight to a particular page by clicking on the page name under the contents list below.

If you have any comments or feedback about this course and/or the resource guide, please email supsup@sheffield.ac.uk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page no.</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Video script (including graphics used):</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What is sexuality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What is sex?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The gender unicorn (graphic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What is gender?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gender grammar (graphic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trans healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Coming out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Estrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Why trans people need more visibility (graphic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>International students and cultural differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5 things you should know about trans people (graphic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slides used after the video:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>What help and support is available in the University?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>What help and support is available in the Students’ Union?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other local support groups and general resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q&amp;As and scenario used to test learning:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Q&amp;As</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Scenario</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is sexuality?

Sexuality is about who you’re attracted to and who you feel drawn to – romantically, emotionally and/or sexually.

The first three letters of LGBT+ all represent different sexualities.

**L** stands for lesbian. Lesbian is used to refer to women who exclusively love other women.

**G** stands for gay, which predominantly refers to men who exclusively love other men. Gay is sometimes used as an umbrella term by the LGBT+ community to refer to lesbians and bisexual people, but this should not be used without their explicit permission.

**B** stands for bisexual, or bi. Bisexuality is having the capacity to be sexually and/or romantically attracted to more than one gender, not necessarily to the same degree or in the same way.

We will now outline other sexualities:

Asexuality is used to refer to people who do not experience sexual attraction and aromantic refers to someone who does not experience romantic attraction. However, ace people (short for asexual) can date, can fall in love, have relationships and have sex.

Pansexual, or pan, is when people are attracted to people regardless of their gender. While some people identify with both bi and pan interchangeably, the words have different meanings. Bi people are attracted to two or more genders, but not necessarily all genders. Whereas, pansexual people are not attracted to specific genders, but are instead attracted to people of all genders.

Queer is used as a label for nonconformity or not being straight. It has historically been used as a slur but has been reclaimed by some people. However, you should not describe someone as queer, unless they have identified themselves in that way.

What is sex?

Sex refers to the physical characteristics of the body, for example chromosomes, genitals, hormones. When we are born doctors assign us either male or female at birth, however this is problematic as there is no real reason that penises are male or vaginas are female. Genitalia or other sex characteristics having a particular gender is not particularly helpful or necessary.

People whose sex cannot be easily categorised like this are called intersex. There are a variety of causes of intersex conditions. Some of these are obvious from birth or puberty, and some people may never know that they are intersex, due to invasive surgeries at birth. You should not ask people to disclose their intersex status as it is incredibly personal and questions may be invasive.
What is gender?

Gender is usually expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, although there are variety of genders beyond these. It is largely culturally determined and is assigned to people at birth, although this doesn’t always reflect a person’s true gender.

The word trans or transgender is an inclusive umbrella term used to describe anyone who feels that the sex that was assigned to them at birth incompletely or fails to describe them. The word ‘cis’ or ‘cisgender’ is used to describe people whose gender does align with the sex that they were assigned at birth.

Although there are binary trans people (trans women and trans men), there are also non binary trans people.

Non-binary can mean different things to different people and the non-binary gender identity spectrum is very broad. It includes: gender-fluid – where someone’s gender identity varies over time; agender – where someone feels they have no gender; bigender – where someone has two distinct gender identities at the same time or at different times.

It is also worth noting that, like all people, trans people can have a range of sexualities (e.g. they can be trans and bisexual/gay/a lesbian).

Gender identity is separate from gender presentation e.g. trans men may choose to wear traditionally feminine clothing or make up. This doesn’t mean they’re not men!
The trans community is a growing one, which is often underrepresented. There are a number of trans students at the University and it is estimated that there are around 3,000 trans people in Sheffield.

Gender dysphoria is the feeling of being uncomfortable with or distressed by your own or other people’s perceptions of your gender and/or body. Transitioning is a process that a trans person undergoes to affirm their gender and alleviate this dysphoria. This process may be psychological, emotional, medical or surgical - for example taking hormones such as estrogen or testosterone. It is worth noting that not all trans people experience dysphoria and someone can transition without any medical or surgical processes.

It is also important to be aware that the process of transitioning may impact on a student’s ability to complete academic work. For example, undergoing surgery would clearly affect a student’s ability to study, as would taking new hormones, or experiencing strong emotions, such as stress. It is therefore crucial that these extenuating circumstances are taken into account, and that students are supported through this period.

Trans and non-binary people may choose to change their pronouns or their name. Pronouns are words used to refer to a noun or person, i.e. she is there, it’s her jacket. This is something that should be fully respected and embraced. Some people, especially people who are non-binary, may choose to use a gender neutral pronoun, such as ‘they. - e.g. They are over there. There are other gender neutral pronouns that you may come across such as ‘ze’. If you are unsure about someone’s pronoun then you are best to ask in a considerate way, rather than making assumptions.

If someone has chosen to change their name then you should always use their chosen name, even if they have not changed their name legally. To use somebody’s birth name may cause them great distress, so it is important to work hard to avoid this. If you do make a mistake then you are best to apologise and assure the student that you will not repeat the mistake. But also, try not to draw too much attention to your mistake, and move on with the conversation.

Here are some tips that local charity SayIt put together for supporting trans people:

- Challenge all discrimination and treat it seriously
- Avoid phrases including ‘sex change’, ‘used to be a boy’, and ‘born in the wrong body.’
- These are unhelpful and can be upsetting
- Don’t be afraid to ask questions, but also don’t expect a trans person to solely educate you, educate yourself.
- Be compassionate, and believe what students are telling you about their experiences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Correction</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“transgendered” (adjective)</td>
<td>transgender</td>
<td>Only adjectives that are derived from nouns and/or verbs (unlike transgender) end in “ed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Only adjectives that are derived from nouns and/or verbs (unlike intersex) end in “ed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“transgendered” (verb)</td>
<td>transition</td>
<td>Only verbs can have “ed” added onto the end of the word to become a participle. Transgender is an adjective, not a verb. One does not “transgender,” they transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“a transgender,” “transgenders”</td>
<td>a transgender person, transgender people</td>
<td>Transgender is not a noun. &quot;Jake is a transgender&quot; is not only grammatically incorrect, but can be offensive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“sex change,” “sex reassignment surgery,” “gender reassignment surgery”</td>
<td>gender affirming surgery, genital reconstruction surgery, genital reassignment surgery</td>
<td>Surgery does not change one’s sex or gender, only genitalia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trans Healthcare

If you are supporting a trans student it is important to recognise how difficult the process of accessing trans health care is. Firstly, the waiting times for Gender Identity Clinics are incredibly long - the average wait for a first appointment with Sheffield’s Gender Identity Clinic is 51 weeks! This is especially challenging as even after that waiting there is no guarantee that the patient will be offered treatment.

Furthermore the current system gives control to healthcare professionals rather than allowing individuals to make consensual decisions about their gender and body. Within Gender Identity Clinics trans people are often stigmatised, disbelieved and asked unnecessarily invasive questions. The clinics are normally staffed by cis people who are effectively the gatekeepers of the treatments that trans people should be entitled to.

Finally, the current system can be expensive and time consuming for students, as individuals are often forced to travel long distances or seek private treatments due to the waiting times under the NHS.

It may be useful to signpost students accessing transition related healthcare to Action for Trans Health, which supports trans people with this process.

Coming Out

To ‘come out’ is to reveal something about yourself which isn’t immediately obvious, and the phrase is predominantly used to refer to LGBT+ people informing other people about their sexuality or gender identity. This is often a difficult conversation to have, and everyone’s experience will be unique. People often have to ‘come out’ multiple times, to friends, family, teachers, employers, on social media, etc. Supporting students through ‘coming out’, is about listening to them, rather than advising them on what to do or recommending a certain action.

People’s decision to ‘come out’ should absolutely be their own and not everyone will choose to ‘come out’. Similarly, people may be ‘out’ to some people and not to others, so it is crucial not to reveal people’s sexualities or gender identities to others, or force people to “come out”. This is called ‘outing’ somebody and can have incredibly negative consequences.

In general accept people’s decision to choose if they come out, who they come out to and when they come out. As ever the best thing that you can do is to listen to students and understand that they may be having a difficult time.
Estrangement

When discussing estrangement in young people or students, the word is used to describe people who are no longer on positive terms or even contact with their family. Estrangement can have an incredibly negative impact on individuals, and unfortunately LGBT+ students are disproportionately likely to be estranged from their family.

One impact of this is financial, as many students receive financial support from their parents. The Equality Challenge Unit has shown that 15% of LGB students and 34.8% of trans students questioned stated that they fear losing financial support if they come out to their parents about their sexual orientation or gender identity. This may subsequently impact their academic performance. Research by Stand Alone, a charity that supports estranged young people found that that 41% of the estranged students that they surveyed had considered withdrawing from their course due to financial pressures, stress and mental health struggles, with fourteen percent actually dropping out, a figure three times higher than the average student. A student’s relationship with their family may fluctuate, complicating the situation and causing further stress and confusion.

There is also the massive issue of housing. Many students live with their parents over the vacation periods. This may mean that estranged students are without a place to live and homelessness is disproportionately high for LGBT+ people.

Even if students do have a place to stay, not having a family to spend these periods with can be lonely and emotional. Over 70% of estranged students reported feelings of isolation.

The University has specific funding support for estranged students, which you can sign post these students to.
WHY TRANS PEOPLE NEED MORE VISIBILITY

With more visibility comes more understanding. These statistics can and will get better as trans people become more visible in our society.

80% of trans students feel unsafe at school because of their gender expression.

58.7% of gender non-conforming students have experienced verbal harassment in the past year because of their gender expression, compared to 29% of their peers.

49% of trans people reported physical abuse in a 2007 survey.

50% of trans people have been raped or assaulted by a romantic partner.

Trans people of color are... more likely to experience physical violence when interacting with the police than white cisgender survivors of violence.

6X

41% of trans people have attempted suicide.

1 in 5 transgender people have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.

1 in 8 have been evicted due to being transgender.

For more information, go to transstudent.org/graphics

Infographic Design by Landyn Pan
International Students and Cultural Differences

One part of the LGBT+ community that may need increased support are LGBT+ international students. The level of support for LGBT+ people varies from country to country. Some countries may be much better than the UK, whilst some are much worse and criminalise being LGBT+. It is important to emphasise that if someone discriminates against you there are processes both legally and across the university that can be undertaken to support them.

Please also emphasise to international students, and any other students who are nervous to ‘come out’ that the LGBT+ committee works to preserve people’s privacy even during LGBT+ events.

Intersectionality

Every LGBT+ student experience is different. This is in part a reflection of the other underrepresented groups that students may fall into. This includes being black and minority ethnic (BME), being disabled, being a woman, coming from a lower socio-economic background, being religious, being a carer, being a care leaver, being a commuter student, to name just a few groups.

Identifying with multiple groups is likely to shape an individual’s experience of being LGBT+. So for example an Asian woman from a lower socioeconomic background is likely to have a very different experience, and face different oppressions to a black disabled man. It is important to recognise these differences and support all elements of students’ identities.

Conclusion

Thank you for watching this video, we hope that you have found it useful! Look out for more training and keep working to educate yourself on this topic!

Key messages to take away from this training are:
- Respect LGBT+ students’ choice of name and pronoun - it's ok to ask which pronoun a student prefers to use (but worth considering first whether you actually need to know)
- Understand that every LGBT+ student is different
- Don’t make assumptions about a student’s sexuality
- Be aware of the different difficulties that the student may be facing (such as estrangement, or struggling to access healthcare)
- Listen to the students and learn from them
- Keep working to educate yourself on this topic

The next section of this training will inform you of the different services that you can signpost students to.
5 Things You Should Know About Trans People

1. Not all trans people identify as male or female. Trans people have all sorts of different identities outside the gender binary.

2. Trans folks actually have many different sexual orientations. Gender identity and sexual orientation are separate spectra. Learn more at: www.transstudent.org/Gender

3. Trans people led the Stonewall Riots. Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were two among many trans women of color who were on the front lines.

4. Not all trans people want surgery and even fewer get surgery.

5. The word transgender was popularized by activist Virginia Prince in 1969. She first published the word in the December 1969 issue of “Transvestia”.

For more information, go to transstudent.org/graphics

Design by Landyn Pan
What help and support is available in the University?

There are a range of support services available to all of our students. These include:

- Central Welfare and Guidance Team - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/cwag](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/cwag)
- Financial Support Team - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/finance](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/finance)
- International Student Support Team - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/international](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/international)
- Student Access to Mental Health Support (SAMHS) - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/mental-wellbeing](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/mental-wellbeing)
- University Health Service - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/health-service](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/health-service)
- Disability and Dyslexia Support Service - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/disability](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/disability)
- Chaplaincy - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/chaplaincy](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/chaplaincy)

Other support is available from:

- Residence Life (for students living in University owned accommodation) - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/accommodation/residence-life](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/accommodation/residence-life)
- LGBT+ staff network (for PGR students who teach) - [www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/equality/networks/lgbtnetwork](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/hr/equality/networks/lgbtnetwork)

Students can be signposted to any of the above services if this seems appropriate and / or you may find it helpful to signpost students to the University’s specific information for LGBT+ students available here: [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/lgbt-students](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/lgbt-students). This includes administrative support for transgender students.

If in doubt, signpost to Student Services Information Desk (SSiD): [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid)

What help and support is available in the Students’ Union?

Student Advice Centre - The Student Advice Centre is a professional, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental service, providing advice, support and representation to help you resolve your problems. [https://su.sheffield.ac.uk/student-advice-centre](https://su.sheffield.ac.uk/student-advice-centre)

LGBT+ Committee - The LGBT+ Committee represents LGBT+ students at the University, organising events, activities and campaigns and advocating for LGBT+ students in the Students’ Union and University. [http://lgbtsu.weebly.com/](http://lgbtsu.weebly.com/)

[CLICK TO GO BACK TO CONTENTS PAGE](#)
Other local support groups and resources

Trans active - http://trans-active.co.uk/
- A local group that organises fitness activities for trans/non-binary/gender-questioning people of all fitness levels.

T-Boys - https://www.facebook.com/tboysyorkshire/
- A Yorkshire based group for anyone assigned female at birth who considers themselves to be on the trans spectrum or is questioning their gender.

Action for Trans Heath - https://actionfortranshealth.org.uk/
- A group that campaigns to improve trans people’s access to healthcare.

Transmap.uk - https://transmap.uk/about
- A map of trans inclusive locations in Sheffield:

More information on pronouns: http://www.pronouns.failedslacker.com/

A useful article for people who think that they might be trans: https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/03/i-think-i-might-be-trans/

Q&As

Q1 - If someone is transgender, this means they have had gender reassignment surgery?

A – False. Someone can transition without any medical or surgical process. The word transition is used to describe the process that a trans person undergoes to move from their assigned gender role into their chosen or acquired gender. This process may be psychological, emotional, medical or surgical.

Q2 - If you are unsure about someone’s gender pronoun, what would you try and do?

A - Ask them which pronoun they prefer to use and/or address them as ‘they’ until it becomes clearer. If you are unsure about a person’s pronoun, you could use a gender neutral pronoun such as ‘they’. It’s OK to ask in a considerate way; just think about whether you actually need to know. You may be able to avoid this situation by stating your pronoun when you introduce yourself, and giving people the option to share their pronoun if they wish too.

Scenario

Alex is bisexual and has known for some time and is entirely comfortable with it. However coming out is a bit of an issue and how people will react is a concern as is the best way to do it. Alex has recently told the family and since then relationships with mum and dad have been somewhat strained. This is really worrying for Alex and is starting to impact on day-to-day life, feelings and the ability to meet academic deadlines. Alex goes to the department for help.

As a supporting member of staff what would you say and do?

A - Listen and accept what Alex is willing to tell you. Focus on what might help, and signpost to some helpful support services.
Listening non judgmentally and giving people time to tell you what’s going on in their life will give you an opportunity to explore what services and procedures can help.
Possible signposting might be:

**Information and support within the University:**
LGBT+ student information: [www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/lgbt-students](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/lgbt-students)

Extenuating circumstances - for consideration of academic adjustments:
[www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/forms/circsnotes](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/forms/circsnotes)

Student Access to Mental Health Support (SAMHS) - for access to mental health support:
[www.sheffield.ac.uk/mental-wellbeing/about-samhs](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/mental-wellbeing/about-samhs)

Central Welfare and Guidance Team (CWaG) - welfare support for significant issues and incidents:
[www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/cwag](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/cwag)

**Support from the Student's Union:**
LGBT+ Committee - a student group that represents LGBT+ students and organises events and activities for LGBT+ students: [http://lgbtsu.weebly.com/](http://lgbtsu.weebly.com/)

[CLICK TO GO BACK TO CONTENTS PAGE](#)