



**Empowering You
as an LGBT+ Scientist**



The problem as I see it is that, there's a view of scientists – science is impartial and shouldn't have politics. Therefore, scientists must be amorphous, faceless things without any identity or any politics or any this that or the other, and that's not true. It's the scientists who do the science and we do better science when we're comfortable.



**Interviewee, *Exploring the Workplace for
LGBT+ Physical Scientists* report**



introduction

The difficulties faced by LGBT+ people in STEM can often be compounded by the assumption that LGBT+ identity is not relevant to science. In fact, scientists are a diverse community who should feel able to bring our whole selves to work – whether or not we choose to do so – without fear of discrimination or prejudice.

This resource aims to provide LGBT+ scientists with information, affirmation and support. The labour of embedding LGBT+ inclusivity in scientific workplaces should not have to fall on you as an LGBT+ individual; employers have a responsibility to build safe and comfortable workplaces for LGBT+ employees, and non-LGBT+ individuals should take responsibility for practising allyship and inclusive behaviour.

The key message to take away is that whatever your sexual orientation and gender identity, and whether or not you are out at work, you deserve to be treated equally and with respect within the STEM community – and everywhere else.



know your rights

This section details the legal protections for LGBT+ people in the UK (as of August 2020). For information on anti-discrimination protections internationally, some useful sources are [equaldex.com](https://www.equaldex.com) and [stonewall.org.uk](https://www.stonewall.org.uk).



Workplaces should be inclusive and welcoming for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. As an LGBT+ scientist, you have the right to work free from discrimination and harassment.

In the UK, 'sexual orientation' and 'gender reassignment' are protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. 'Gender reassignment' explicitly refers not only to medical interventions but also to any other elements of gender transition a person might undergo, such as changes in name, pronouns, or gender expression; a person does not need to medically transition in any way to be protected under the Act.

The Act protects against:

- Direct discrimination – treating LGBT+ people differently from non-LGBT+ people.
- Indirect discrimination – policies or practices that disadvantage LGBT+ people.
- Harassment – conduct that creates a hostile or offensive environment for LGBT+ people.
- Victimisation – negative treatment of someone who makes a discrimination complaint.

Protection under the Act extends specifically to transition-related absences from work. You must not be treated less favourably than you would be if you were absent because of illness or injury, and transition-related absences from work should not be used to your detriment.

When it comes to discrimination and harassment, it's important to remember that it's the *effect* of the conduct or practice that counts, not the intention. Even the most well-meaning colleagues can perpetuate harmful attitudes or assumptions, and actions that feel small on their own can build up. Speaking up about a work climate that's negatively impacting on your wellbeing and ability to do your job comfortably shouldn't be seen as a last resort. You should also be entitled to support from a colleague or union representative in any relevant meetings.

It's also important to note that while religion or belief (or lack thereof) is also a legally protected characteristic, behaviours or actions motivated by religion or belief that constitute discrimination or harassment based on LGBT+ status are not legally protected.

Employers are legally liable for any action constituting discrimination or harassment by those acting on their behalf, unless the employer can demonstrate having taken all reasonable steps to prevent such actions.

Data concerning your LGBT+ status should be treated sensitively and confidentially, and you should be fully informed of your data rights in accordance with GDPR (in the UK and Europe).

In the UK, data regarding trans status is explicitly protected under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 – see our resource on [building trans-inclusive workplaces](#).

You don't have to have a particular protected characteristic yourself to bring a complaint of discrimination or harassment under the Act. For example, if someone at work makes a homophobic, biphobic or transphobic joke or comment, anyone who hears it – whether LGBT+ or not – can raise a complaint on the basis that this behaviour created a hostile environment for them, and was targeting a legally protected characteristic. This means that if you're not out at work, you don't have to out yourself to raise issues of discrimination and harassment. It also means that non-LGBT+ people may be able to take on the work of complaining about LGBT+-exclusionary practices or incidents if they feel comfortable doing so.

For more information:

- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [UNISON factsheet on lesbian, gay and bisexual workers rights](#)
- [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#)

self-care



Self-care means taking the time to ensure you're attending to your own mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. It's about mindfully checking in with your needs and feelings, and recognising the importance of ranking yourself as high priority.

For marginalised and/or underrepresented groups, self-care can be especially important in combatting the negative messages we receive from society. That doesn't mean accepting the fact that those messages exist, or placing the responsibility for overcoming them on ourselves rather than holding those around us accountable; it simply means nourishing our capacity for wellness, resilience and joy, even in unfair circumstances. Practising self-care means refusing to internalise prejudice and invalidation by affirming that we are worthy and deserving of care.

Here are some principles and practical tips for cultivating self-care behaviours and attitudes as an LGBT+ person.

- **Visibility** is important, and **safety and comfort** are important too. It's your choice how these balance out for you in any given environment. You might find being open and visible as an LGBT+ person is best for your wellbeing, or you might value privacy over visibility and prefer not to have those conversations in the workplace at all. Coming out or not coming out (or somewhere in between) is a decision you make for yourself, not someone else.
- Identify and respect your own **boundaries**. It's important to be aware of the **emotional load** that can come with fielding questions about your identity and experiences, or discussing your own marginalisation, even within the LGBT+ community. Remind yourself that it's ok to say no, or 'I'd rather not talk about that (right now)'. Remember, you shouldn't have to explain your identity for it to be respected, and it's ok to walk away from a conversation that's causing you harm.
- Find and maintain your **support networks**. These don't have to be LGBT+ people, just people you trust and share understanding with, who you can turn to for support when you need to. These might be friends, family, colleagues, or professionals such as a staff counsellor or mentor. And make sure you ask for support when you need it. This can sound casual if you want it to: 'Can I just vent to you about something?' or 'I need a distraction from my thoughts, can we play a game together?'
- **Connect** with other LGBT+ people. Finding **community** where others can fully empathise with issues you might be facing as an LGBT+ person – and may have similar experiences to share – can help relieve feelings of isolation and alienation. Social media is one way to connect with LGBT+ STEM communities (see 'resources' below) where it is possible to maintain anonymity if desired; this might be useful if you aren't out at work.
- **Unplug** from current events. Consume news media carefully and in a measured way; figure out what time of day you tend to feel most grounded, check the news then for a limited time period, and turn off notifications for the rest of the day. Curate your social media; unfollow, mute, or unfriend accounts that have a more negative than positive impact on your wellbeing, and actively follow those that promote LGBT+ positivity and self-expression.
- Look for **media** that **represents** people like you. It's easy to underestimate the cumulative emotional toll that a lack of representation can take. When we see people like us reflected in wider society, it can help us feel less alienated in our identities. Seek out TV and books with LGBT+ characters, and music and art by LGBT+ creators. See 'resources' at the back for a list of podcasts platforming LGBT+ scientists, as well as some links to broader LGBT+ media.

solidarity

As LGBT+ people and communities, it's important that we see ourselves as being situated within a broader, intersectional network of marginalised and/or underrepresented groups and experiences.

One way that we can show solidarity with other marginalised people is simply by recognising that LGBT+ inclusion is part of a wider picture. Working to end homophobic, biphobic and transphobic discrimination and harassment – in our workplaces, our scientific communities, and society as a whole – necessarily intersects with the struggles of other marginalised people and groups.

We should take care to recognise – and celebrate – the diversity of LGBT+ people. Our communities must actively respect and make space for underrepresented identities. This means creating visibility for LGBT+ identities that are often marginalised – such as asexuality, bi/pansexuality, and trans and non-binary identity – but also addressing the particular issues faced by LGBT+ Black and minority ethnic people, LGBT+ women, and disabled LGBT+ people. Giving an equal platform to diverse voices means that we can collectively address all forms of LGBT+ marginalisation, while also advancing multiple forms of inclusivity.

Allyship is crucial in the fight for equality and inclusion. Just as LGBT+ communities ask non-LGBT+ people to act in allyship with us, we must ensure we are practising allyship with other marginalised people.

The first step towards this is ensuring that discrimination and harassment do not go unchallenged within our communities; for guidance on being an active bystander, see our [\[Practising active allyship resource\]](#). LGBT+ groups can also take active steps to ensure their events and campaigns are inclusive. For example, groups should consider using the inclusive pride flag – which adds black and brown stripes to the rainbow flag, to represent LGBT+ people of colour – and must ensure events are made accessible to disabled members of the community. More guidance on inclusive events and communications can be found [\[here\]](#).



‘Intersectionality’:

*A framework for understanding how multiple systems of oppression interact in the lives of those with more than one marginalised identity. Intersectionality looks at how the overlapping vulnerabilities created by various forms of discrimination and disempowerment create specific challenges, which cannot be fully addressed by combatting different kinds of oppression separately. The term was coined by law professor **Kimberlé Crenshaw** to underline the specific intersection of misogyny and racism faced by Black women.*

To learn more about the terminology used in this resource, see our [Glossary](#)



resources

RSC bullying and harassment support line:

- [rsc.org/new-perspectives/talent/bullying-and-harassment-support](https://www.rsc.org/new-perspectives/talent/bullying-and-harassment-support)

LGBT+ support sources (UK-based):

- switchboard.lgbt
- lgbt.foundation/how-we-can-help-you
- bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-counselling/mindline-transplus
- pinktherapy.com
- regard.org.uk

LGBT+ STEM campaigns and communities:

- lgbtstem.wordpress.com
- prideinstem.org
- 500queerscientists.com

Setting up an LGBT+ staff network:

- stonewall.org.uk/system/files/setting_up_an_lgbt_employee_network_group.pdf

LGBT+ STEM podcasts:

- anchor.fm/lgbtqstemcast
- anchor.fm/mfqc
- scicurious.co.uk

Videos from LGBT+ scientists about being LGBT+ in STEM:

- [youtube.com/watch?v=cReilVsgNGs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cReilVsgNGs)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=PPtMrF2_Foo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPtMrF2_Foo)

LGBT+ STEM issues in media:

- royalsociety.org/blog/2020/02/why-i-cant-ignore-that-im-lgbt-to-do-my-job
- tigerinstemm.org/resources/sexual-orientationidentity
- lgbtstem.wordpress.com/lgbt-stem-in-the-media
- prideinstem.org/resources-2

Wider LGBT+ media – podcasts and web series:

- stitcher.com/podcast/uncensored-visionary
- wnycstudios.org/podcasts/nancy
- globalplayer.com/podcasts/42KqTF
- them.us/entertainment
- intomore.com/you/10-queer-web-series-to-binge-watch



Other resources in this toolkit



EMPOWERING YOU AS AN LGBT+ SCIENTIST



Taking concrete steps towards greater LGBT+ inclusivity is a key part of fostering diverse and welcoming scientific workplaces.

This resource is part of the Royal Society of Chemistry LGBT+ toolkit, which aims to tackle the key workplace issues faced by LGBT+ physical scientists. The toolkit builds on the findings of the 2019 report *Exploring the Workplace for LGBT+ Physical Scientists*, and includes resources to equip everyone to take part in positive change: employers, colleagues, and LGBT+ people.



Whoever you are, you can make a real difference towards LGBT+ inclusivity in science.

Find out more at rsc.li/lgbt-toolkit

To learn more about the terminology used in this resource, see our **Glossary**

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