



# Government action on LGBT rights

## Creating a fair society

The Government is committed to creating a fair society with equal chances for everyone. For society to be fair, people must have the chance to live their lives freely and fulfil their potential.

For too long, prejudice and discrimination have made it difficult for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people to have the same chances as heterosexual people, and to live their lives to the full.

But things are changing.

In the last decade we have become world leaders in the advancement of LGBT rights.

## Making history – a decade of success

The Government has taken strong action to help ensure LGBT people are no longer treated as second class citizens. We have given LGBT people protection from discrimination at work and in their everyday lives. We have given gay couples the same legal rights and responsibilities as heterosexual couples and have enabled transsexual men and women to have their true gender recognised by the law.

**Late 1990s**     **Protection for transsexual people in employment:** We made it unlawful for employers to discriminate against transsexual employees.

**2000**            **Lifting of the armed forces ban:** Following a European Court of Human Rights judgment, lesbians and gay men were no longer banned from serving in the UK armed forces.

**Equal age of consent:** The age of consent was made 16 for everyone in England, Scotland and Wales. It used to be 21 for sex between men, and there was no age of consent for sex between women.



- 2002**      **Lesbian and gay couples allowed to adopt:** The Adoption and Children Act 2002 made it possible for same sex couples to apply jointly to adopt children.
- 2003**      **Repeal of Section 28:** Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 prohibited local authorities in England and Wales from ‘promoting’ homosexuality and labelled same sex family relationships as ‘pretend.’ By repealing it, we allowed teachers to better deal with homophobic bullying in schools and local authorities to provide services targeted at LGB communities.
- 2004**      **Civil partnerships introduced:** So far over 26,000 same sex couples have gained the same legal security, protection and rights as heterosexual married couples by getting a civil partnership. Bringing civil partnerships in removed a lot of the practical barriers gay and lesbian couples faced in their everyday lives – for instance, not getting survivor pension and tax rights if one partner died.
- Gender Recognition Act:** For the first time transsexual men and women were able to have their true gender recognised by the law. To date, this has transformed the lives of over 2,300 people. The Act also safeguards their privacy by banning authorities from disclosing information about their gender reassignment.
- 2005**      **Transsexual people protected from harassment:** Protection from harassment in employment was extended to transsexual people.
- 2007**      **Discrimination in goods and services banned:** The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 mean that businesses and other organisations are not allowed to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation. It’s now unlawful to refuse someone service in a pub or a shop because they’re gay, or to refuse a gay couple a room in a hotel.
- 2008**      **Extending the protection for transsexual people:** We extended protection against discrimination and harassment for transsexual people in goods and services.



## Why we must do more

We are proud of our achievements on LGBT rights, but there is more to do. While a combination of laws and wider action has brought us a long way over the past decade, homophobia and transphobia still persist today. Research carried out by Stonewall and Press for Change shows that:

- More than six out of ten lesbian and gay schoolchildren experience homophobic bullying.<sup>1</sup>
- One in four lesbian and gay people expect to be treated worse by police if they are a victim of hate crime.<sup>2</sup>
- 47% of trans people do not use public social or leisure facilities for fear of discriminatory treatment.<sup>3</sup>

## Working towards a fairer future

To help us create the equal and fair society we all want to see we will:

### **Introduce an Equality Bill which will fight discrimination in all its forms and help make equality a reality for everyone**

The Bill will **strengthen** and **streamline** existing equalities legislation and **support** our wider work to promote equality.

It will also include a new 'Equality Duty' which means public bodies will have to tackle sexual orientation and gender reassignment discrimination by considering how to accommodate the needs of LGBT service users in the design and delivery of public services. This will mean that sexual orientation and gender reassignment are treated in exactly the same way as race, disability and gender are now.

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Hunt and Johan Jensen, *The School Report: the experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools*, Stonewall Publication 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Hunt and Sam Dick, *Serves you right: Lesbian and gay people's expectations of discrimination*, Stonewall Publication 2008.

<sup>3</sup> S Whittle, L Turner and Maryam Al-Alami, *Engendered Penalties: Transgender and Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination*, 2007.



### **Make incitement to homophobic hatred an offence**

An offence of stirring up hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation was included in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008. The Government wants to implement the offence as soon as possible, through legislation currently before Parliament. This will help tackle homophobic extremism.

### **Work for LGBT rights across the world**

LGBT people worldwide face daily violations of their human rights. For example, same sex relations are still illegal in over 70 countries, and in several they are punishable by death. Internationally, we lead the way in LGBT rights, which is why last year we signed a UN Declaration demanding an end to legal punishment for being gay, lesbian or bisexual.

## **More information**

For more information on the work of the Government Equalities Office visit [www.equalities.gov.uk](http://www.equalities.gov.uk)

Alternatively, contact our general enquiries line on 020 7944 0601 or email [enquiries@geo.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@geo.gsi.gov.uk).