

Inclusive Schools:

Ending the exclusion of lesbian,
gay and bisexual youth

Implementing the DfEE's Guidance on
'Sex and Relationship Education' and Anti-
Bullying for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth

Briefing Paper for Governors, Headteach-
ers, and Education Leeds

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Yorkshire MESMAC

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Foreword

The following are statements submitted in support of this document and the Inclusive Schools Project:

“The Government believes that Section 28 is an unnecessary piece of legislation, which offends many gay and lesbian people by stigmatising their lifestyle. Section 28 also does not affect what can be taught in schools. This is governed by the Learning and Skills Act, which includes an emphasis on children learning the importance of marriage and protecting them from inappropriate materials. Furthermore, the Department for Education and Skills’ Sex and Relationship Education guidance makes it clear that teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support, and that there should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation. It also emphasises that schools need to be able to deal with homophobic bullying. Section 28 adds nothing to these safeguards. It promotes prejudice and insults a section of the community.”

Beatrice Hammond, Curriculum Division, Department for Education and Skills

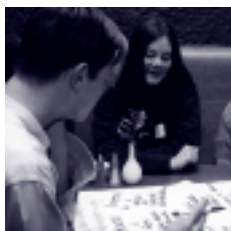
“Yorkshire MESMAC welcomes this influential and timely project. As an organisation, Yorkshire MESMAC is committed to meeting the needs of the young people in our target group. Time and again, research has shown that young people have a high degree of unmet needs; educational institutions in particular have a vital role in addressing this deficit. We hope you find the enclosed interesting and of use and we look forward to receiving your feedback.”

Tom Doyle, Director, Yorkshire MESMAC



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1.1 Central Government Legislation and Guidance

1.1a Equalisation of the Age of Consent

Recent history has witnessed several parliamentary debates and votes on the age of consent for gay men. In April 2000, the age of consent for gay men was reduced to 16, thus making it equal to that of heterosexuals. As there is no specific age of consent for lesbians, the age of 16 applies.

1.1b Bullying

In June 1999, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) issued a circular, Social Inclusion: Pupil Support Circular 10/99, to all headteachers stating that pupils had a legal right to protection against homophobic bullying in schools, and that schools had a clear legal duty to prevent it. The circular stated that:

The emotional distress caused by bullying in whatever form — be it racial, or as a result of a child's appearance, behaviour or special education needs, or related to sexual orientation — can prejudice school achievement, lead to lateness or truancy and, in extreme cases, end with suicide. [It added that] all teaching and non-teaching staff, including lunchtime supervisors, should be alert to the signs of bullying and act promptly and firmly. Students may see failure to respond to incidents or allegations as tolerating bullying (cited in Mullen, 1999a).

The circular formalised the DfEE's earlier policies, which indicated that homophobic bullying should be actively tackled in schools.

In December 2000, the DfEE launched its anti-bullying pack, *Bullying — Don't Suffer in Silence*, distributed to all schools. It included the advice that to reducing homophobic bullying, school strategies should:

- Include sexual orientation in the school's anti-bullying policy — so pupils know discrimination is wrong and the school will act.
- Cover it in INSET days on bullying in general.
- Guarantee confidentiality and appropriate advice to lesbian and gay pupils.
- Challenge homophobic language.
- Explore issues of diversity and difference — discussing what schools and society can do to end discrimination.
- Explore pupils' understanding of their use of homophobic language — they may not understand its impact.

1.1c Section 28

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 states that:

(1) A local authority shall not (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship (cited in Local Government Association, 2001).

This legislation applies to the advice given by local education authorities; it does not apply to schools. Research however reveals that the existence of, and ongoing debate around, Section 28 has confused and worried schools and teachers about whether they can discuss lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in the classroom. In fact, there is nothing in the statute that prevents the discussion of these issues, as was clearly stated in the circular, Department of Education Circular 12/88, which accompanied Section 28:

Section 28 does not affect the activities of school governors, nor of teachers. It will not prevent the objective discussion of homosexuality in the classroom, nor the counselling of pupils concerned about their sexuality (cited in Thompson and Fox, 1998).

Essentially, Section 28 applies to the local education authority (LEA), social services, and youth service; it does not apply to schools, where the governing body is responsible and not the LEA. Even if Section 28 did apply to schools, it would be open to debate as to what the phrase ‘promotes’ actually means. A further point on the issue of ‘promotion’ should be noted: the Sex and Relationship Education guidance (detailed in 1.1d) states that, “*There should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation*” (DfEE, 2000a).

This would include ‘promoting’ heterosexuality over homosexuality.

Furthermore, the Local Government Act 2000 amended Section 28 and stated that: “*(There is nothing to) prevent the headteacher or governing body of a maintained school, or a teacher employed by a maintained school, from taking steps to prevent any form of bullying*”.

1.1d Sex and Relationship Education

In July 2000, the DfEE issued a circular, Sex and Relationship Education Guidance 0116/2000. With regard to sexual identity and sexual orientation, it stated that

It is up to schools to make sure that the needs of all pupils are met in their programmes. Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that sex and relationship education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment is clear that teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support. There should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation. Sexual orientation and what is taught in schools is an area of concern for some parents. Schools that liaise closely with parents when developing their sex and relationship education policy and programme should be able to reassure parents of the content of the programme and the context in which it will be presented. Schools need to be able to deal with homophobic bullying. Guidance issued by the Department (Social Inclusion: Pupil Support Circular 10/99) dealt with the unacceptability of and emotional distress and harm caused by bullying in whatever form – be it racial, as a result of a pupil’s appearance, related to sexual orientation or for any other reason (DfEE, 2000a).

1.2 Local Government Guidance

Another local education authority (LEA), Bradford LEA, issued its *Cultural Diversity in Practice: Guide for Schools in 2000*. This recommended that secondary schools should

- Acknowledge that Section 28 does not apply to schools, and should make this clear to governors and parents.
- Challenge homophobic bullying in the same way as other forms of bullying.
- Ensure that there is explicit mention of the unacceptability of homophobic comments, name calling, and aggressive behaviour in the school's guidelines on bullying, behaviour, and equal opportunities.
- Remember that they have a statutory duty to meet the pastoral needs of all their pupils.
- Help pupils evaluate the teachings of the major faiths on family life and relationships.
- Include homosexuality in sex education and other discussions that centre around heterosexual life choices — discussions around sexuality are an essential part of the school curriculum.
- Include lesbian and gay helplines in school/sixth-form planners and on school noticeboards along with other helplines.
- Make it clear that they acknowledge gay and lesbian pupils within the school community.
- Consider ways of acknowledging the presence of loving, same-sex relationships within the school community.
- Listen to pupils who want to talk about themselves. Young people should never have to feel they are 'the only one' or that they are 'invisible'.



1.3 European Union Legislation

A European Commission Directive will be introduced in 2003 which will protect gay and lesbian staff from harassment and unfair dismissal in the workplace. This will almost certainly prevent cases like that of Shirley Pearce, as reported in the Observer (14 October 2001):

Shirley Pearce taught in a Hampshire school for 20 years until retiring on health grounds last year. She had suffered years of abuse, but her employers took no effective action. 'The verbal cruelty was constant and persistent. I totally lost confidence in myself,' says Pearce, 54. 'It took every ounce of my strength to walk through the door every day and I was just told I should "grit my teeth" and put up with it.'



1.4 Social Exclusion and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth: ReachOUT's Research

1.4a Social Exclusion

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are a discriminated against and socially excluded group. Evidence to support these assertions can be found in the many research studies conducted over the last two decades. Take for example the ReachOUT study¹ (Mullen 1999a; 1999b), involving 276 surveys, plus interviews with 35 young lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Although the findings and recommendations are particular to Reading, they are not specific to Reading; they are therefore of relevance to Leeds.

The ReachOUT study found that:

- One third of those interviewed had been bullied at school because of their sexual identity.
- 70 per cent had been verbally abused, 30 per cent physically abused, and 24 per cent harassed, principally because of their sexual identity (often at school).
- 55 per cent had thought about committing suicide, 22 per cent had attempted, and 33 per cent had deliberately harmed themselves.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth were three times more likely to suffer from depression, and young men were four times more likely to attempt suicide, compared to their heterosexual peers.
- 45 per cent felt their sex education had been 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- 6 per cent of young men and 30 per cent of young women did not practice safer sex.
- 15 per cent of these young people considered their alcohol consumption to be a problem.
- 16 per cent had sold sex for money.
- 22 per cent had experienced domestic violence.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth were more likely to use 'harder' drugs compared to their heterosexual peers.
- 12 per cent had had an eating disorder.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth were three times more likely to be made homeless, often because of their sexual identity.
- Asian and Black lesbian, gay and bisexual youth faced a number of additional problems: racism, homophobia from within their own communities, conflict around their identity, etc.

These young people face a vicious cycle of social exclusion as shown in figure 1.

Footnotes

- 1 ReachOUT was a lesbian, gay and bisexual youth project in Reading, funded by the National Lottery to undertake a three-year research project (1997 – 2000)

**Figure 1:
The Vicious Cycle of Social Exclusion
facing some Young Lesbian, Gay and
Bisexuals**



Notes

- 2 'Heterosexism' refers to the assumption or presumption of heterosexuality by individuals, institutions and society.
- 3 'Homophobia' refers to an irrational dislike, fear and/or hatred of homosexuality.
- 4 'Internalised homophobia' refers to a dislike, fear and/or hatred of being gay or lesbian by people who are gay, lesbian or unsure because of society's homophobia.

1.4b Bullying

(All references cited in Mullen, 1999a.)

Trenchard and Warren's (1984) study of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth found that 45 per cent had experienced problems at school because of their sexual identity: 58 per cent had been verbally abused, and 21 per cent had been physically assaulted. Fahey's (1995) study of higher education settings found that 40 per cent of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth felt isolated, 39 per cent had been verbally abused, and four per cent had been physically assaulted. Mason and Palmer's (1996) national survey of hate crimes revealed that 50 per cent of violent assaults against lesbian, gay and bisexual youth involved fellow students and 40 per cent occurred at school. Forty-four per cent of harassment was from fellow students, as was 79 per cent of verbal abuse. And Nayak and Kehily (1996) found that homophobic practices were regarded by students and teachers as natural and routine in the developing lives of young gay men (cited in Douglas et al, 1997).

Douglas et al (1997) surveyed 307 secondary schools in England and Wales for the Institute of Education and found that 82 per cent of teachers were aware of homophobic verbal bullying and 26 per cent were aware of physical bullying in their schools. Ninety-nine per cent of these schools had a bullying policy but only six per cent of policies made any reference to the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual students. Rivers' (1998) study of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth found that 82 per cent had experienced name calling at school, 71 per cent had been ridiculed, 60 per cent had been hit or kicked, 58 per cent had been teased, 59 per cent had the subject of rumours, 49 per cent had experienced theft, 52 per cent had been frightened by a look or stare, and 40 per cent had attempted suicide.

Duncan (1999) found widespread sexual bullying of male students aged between 11 and 16 by their peers at school. The study also found 'that the term gay was used as a catch-all term of abuse by aggressive male students wishing to highlight any traits they perceived as being undesirable, such as academic success, lack of interest in sport, or lack of aggression'. Homophobic bullying therefore also affects young people who are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, as well as those who are. Duncan then argued that there was widespread homophobia within schools — not only individual institutions, but as a system — because schools were built on the idea of the 'norm'. Duncan also found that 'teachers too, sometimes display, usually unwittingly, behaviour that compounds...difficulties' (Pink Paper, 1999c).

Although little or no research to date has looked at the consequences of homophobic bullying, for example, on young lesbian, gay and bisexual's academic attainment at school (or achievements, confidence, mental health, etc. later in life), it seems legitimate to ask whether homophobic bullying at school does affect the academic lives of these young people? Manchester's Young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Peer Support Project, in describing the development of their after school study clubs stated that:

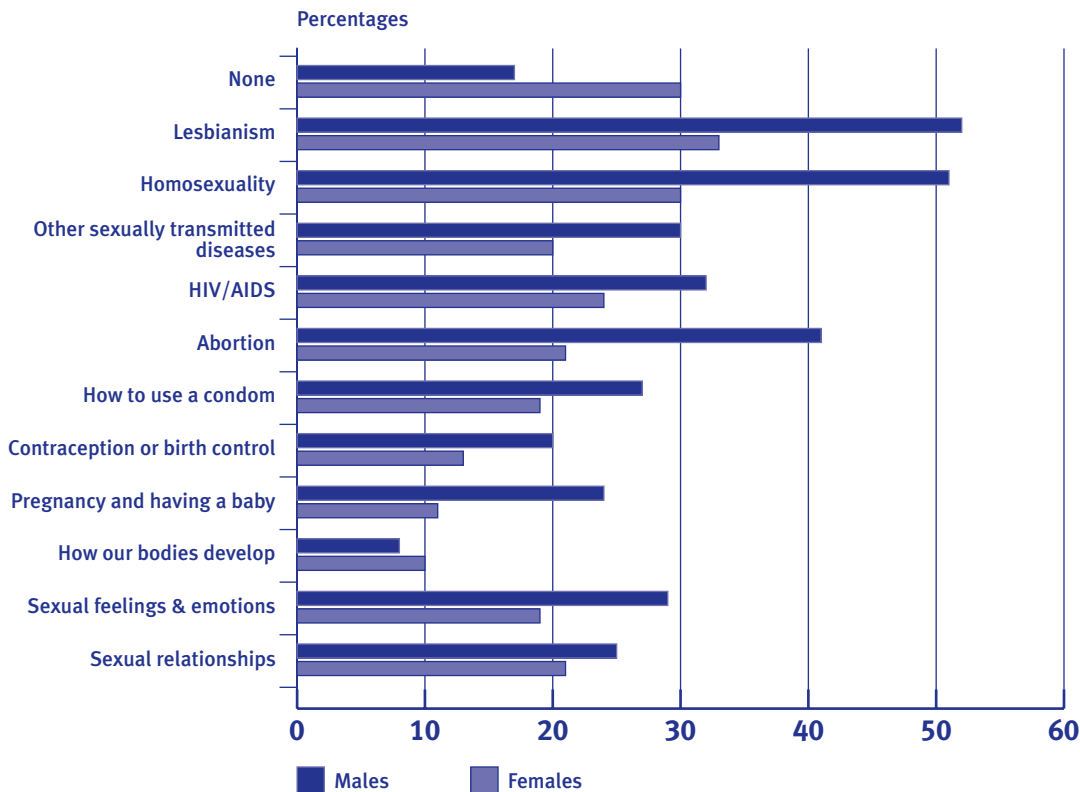
The academic work of young lesbians, gays and bisexuals often suffers as a result of homophobic bullying [and that] the study club offers a peaceful environment for young people to do their homework and receive academic support. Staffed by qualified teachers and peer supporters, the club also supports young people to think about and discuss issues such as coming out and bullying. Central to the work is an understanding that bullying is not necessarily direct. Nonetheless, it can impact powerfully on the lives of young lesbians, gays and bisexuals since it generates fear and a perceived danger to self and sense of self (Hunter et al, 1999).

1.4c Sex Education

(All references cited in Mullen, 1999a.)

A Health Education Authority (1990) survey of 4,400 adolescents aged 16–19 found that only 18 per cent had received any information on gay male issues and only 14 per cent on lesbianism. However, over half the young women and one third of the young men wanted more information about homosexuality and lesbianism (as shown in the following graph).

Topics about which young people thought they had not received enough information, by gender, in Year 11 (age 15)



Reproduced from Coleman and Schofield (2001: 67).

The National Children's Bureau's (1992) report on sex education concluded that there was anxiety, confusion and inconsistency in schools about sex education and Section 28 (cited in Black, 1994). A Health Education Authority (1994) study of 1,462 parents found that 94 per cent thought schools should play a role in teaching pupils about sexuality issues, 56 per cent sexual identity and 80 per cent HIV (cited in Douglas et al, 1997). Stonewall (1994) surveyed 2,408 lesbians, gays and bisexuals about their sex education. Forty-eight per cent of respondents stated that their sex education had been poor or very poor, 31 per cent had received no sex education and only 15 per cent had received a good or adequate sex education. Assessing the coverage of male homosexuality in sex education, only one per cent felt the coverage had been good, 13 per cent felt it had been very poor and 82 per cent said it had been non-existent. Assessing the coverage of lesbianism, six per cent felt it had been very poor and 89 per cent said it had been non-existent. Of the 390 young men who had received sex education since 1987 (the year of the government's first HIV awareness campaign) 41 per cent confirmed that safer sex had been discussed but only 2.5 per cent said safer sex for young gay men had been discussed.

1.4d Schools and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Issues

(All references cited in Mullen, 1999a)

The Institute of Education study by Douglas *et al* (1997) found that 98 per cent per cent of schools had equal opportunity and confidentiality policies, but only 25 per cent referred to lesbian, gay and bisexual issues. Sixty-one per cent of teachers were aware of bisexual, gay and lesbian pupils in their schools, and 42 per cent had been approached by these young people for advice and support. In terms of teachers and schools addressing homophobic bullying, the most frequently cited factors felt to hinder efforts were: worries

about parental disapproval (22 per cent), lack of experienced staff (15 per cent) and lack of policies (14 per cent). Furthermore, although 98 per cent of these schools had sex education policies, only 51 per cent referred to lesbian, gay and bisexual issues. Sixty-two per cent of teachers thought that schools were appropriate settings to deal with sexual identity. Sixty-one per cent felt that sexual identity should be part of the taught curriculum. Seventy-five per cent of teachers were aware of Section 28, eight per cent thought it made discussion of homosexuality illegal while 20 per cent did not know. Forty-eight per cent of teachers had experienced difficulties in addressing the needs of young bisexuals, gay and lesbians because of Section 28. Ninety-five per cent of the schools addressed HIV in the sex education and ten per cent had a policy of supporting pupils and families with or affected by HIV and AIDS. However, 72 per cent of teachers had not received any training around HIV-related issues.

Mullen (1999b), in the Berkshire Anti-Homophobia Group study, found that one-third of verbal abuse incidents occurred at school, as did one in ten physical abuse incidents, one in ten harassment incidents, and five per cent of sexual abuse incidents. Mullen's (1999a) study of schools in Reading found that all schools had an equal opportunities policy, a bullying policy, and a sex education policy. However, only a minority of schools included sexual identity in their policies. Lack of awareness and acceptance, lack of confidence among staff, and the macho attitude of some students, were all cited as factors making difficult the tackling of homophobia in schools. In Reading, there was a mixed picture: some schools were addressing lesbian, gay and bisexual issues and needs as expressed through policy, practice and training; others are not. There was no private/state school divide on these issues; neither sector was more progressive on these issues. This mixed picture reflected the fact that the LEA (first Berkshire, now Reading) had not provided any assistance or guidance on these issues, and central government has only recently begun to. The result is that matters have been left to individual governors, headteachers and teachers to address. The outcome is patchy provision; provision that is not standardised in terms of quality. As a consequence, young lesbians, gays and bisexuals cannot assume that they will receive the appropriate education, safe environment, access to information, or an environment conducive to personal development and growth that others take for granted, and which they should be able to expect. Being bisexual, gay or lesbian (out or not), or questioning sexual identity, may effect academic achievement, the development of friendship networks, access to peer support, personal safety, mental health (confidence and self-esteem, feelings of suicide, etc.), and personal development and growth in negative ways. Given that for most young people school is a full-time occupation, and given that school life is formative, its importance to lesbian, gay and bisexual young people's lives is clear. Likewise, given that a diverse society is a *reality*, it is important that heterosexual young people develop an awareness and understanding of diversity and tolerance. This will stand them in good stead through their adulthood.



1.5 Recommendations to Education Leeds

- (1) Education Leeds should develop and circulate advice and guidance for secondary schools on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, for example, the age of consent, Section 28 (and if repealed, what replaces it), good practice, and policy development (anti-bullying, equality and sex education policies), working in partnership with local lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations.
- (2) Education Leeds should ensure the provision of training for governors, headteachers, teachers, education welfare officers and other staff on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, utilising local and national research.
- (3) Education Leeds should co-ordinate the development of a resource bank (of information, training packs, and videos, etc.) on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues for loan by schools and others in the education sector.
- (4) Education Leeds should co-ordinate the development and maintenance of an up-to-date database of local and national lesbian, gay and bisexual helping organisations and services. This should be accessible to teachers and others in the education sector.
- (5) Education Leeds should monitor and record all cases of homophobic abuse, bullying, and harassment reported by schools and/or young people. They should evaluate and monitor the response of schools to incidents, and provide appropriate advice and guidance.

1.6 Recommendations to Secondary Schools in Leeds

- (6) All schools should ensure that they have anti-bullying, confidentiality, equality and sex education policies which specifically make reference to lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils. All pupils, staff and parents/carers should be made aware of these policies.
- (7) All schools should ensure that their sex education curriculum and scheme of work meets the needs of all its pupils by including work on lesbian, gay and bisexual issues.
- (8) All schools should strive towards creating a safe and supportive environment for lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils, staff and the wider community.
- (9) All schools should provide training for governors, headteachers, teachers and ancillary staff that includes lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, utilising local and national research.
- (10) All schools should ensure that staff are aware of, and have access to, an Education Leeds-co-ordinated resource bank.
- (11) All schools should ensure that their libraries have a diverse stock of books, including those of interest to lesbians, gays and bisexuals.
- (12) All schools, either directly or by referring to other agencies, should provide their students with access to a free counselling service. It is important that students can access this service discreetly so that their anonymity and confidentiality is assured.
- (13) All schools should develop, and all school staff should be aware of, referral procedures for local lesbian, gay and bisexual helping organisations (for example the Out to 25 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Group and Bradford Lesbian and Gay Switchboard).
- (14) All schools should offer students access to information about local lesbian, gay and bisexual helping organisations and services. This information should be included in school handbooks and displayed *permanently* on noticeboards.
- (15) All schools should monitor and record all types of abuse, bullying and harassment against pupils and staff – including homophobia. This information should be shared with Education Leeds.
- (16) Together with Leeds Health Promotion, the Youth and Community Service and other agencies, schools should develop and conduct an Anti-Bullying Campaign to raise awareness of homophobia and other lesbian, gay and bisexual issues among parents, pupils and teachers.



1.7 Sources of Information and Support

▪ Faiths

Al-Fatiha Foundation (for lesbian, gay and bisexual Muslims)
www.al-fatiha.com

Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement
Oxford House, Derbyshire Street, London, E2 6HG

Quest (for lesbian, gay and bisexual Catholics)
BM Box 2585, London, WC1N 3XX

▪ Minority Ethnic Communities

Biet Klal Yisrael (for Jewish lesbians, gays and bisexuals)
(0208) 960 5750
PO Box 1828, London, W10 5RT

Terence Higgins Trust (THT) Black Men's Development Worker
(0207) 831 0330

Black Lesbian and Gay Centre
(0207) 620 3885

Irish Gay and Lesbian Helpline
(0208) 208 2855

Jewish Lesbian and Gay Helpline
(0207) 706 3123

Naz Project (for South Asian, Arabic, Irani and Turkish lesbians, gays and bisexuals)
(0208) 563 0191
241 King Street, London, W6

▪ Parents/Carers

Pink Parents of West Yorkshire
(01274) 733858
parents@lgbnet.clara.co.uk

Parents Together
(0208) 650 5268
PO Box 464, London, SE25 4AT

Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG)
(0207) 791 2854

▪ Teachers

School's Out
(0161) 835 9435
PO Box 153, Manchester, M60 1LP
www.schools-out.org.uk

▪ Transgendered (Transvestites and Transsexuals)

Beaumont Society
(0207) 730 7453
BM 3084, London, WC1N 3XX

Trans-york (Yorkshire group for transvestites and transsexuals)
www.trans-york.org

▪ Young People

Albert Kennedy Trust (for homeless lesbian, gay and bisexual youth)
(0161) 953 4059

Streetwise Youth (for young men selling sex)
(0207) 370 0406

Out to 25 LGB Youth Group
07903 319435
PO Box 417, Leeds, LS1 5PN

▪ Miscellaneous

Yorkshire MESMAC (sexual health project for gay and bisexual men)
(0113) 244 4209
PO Box 417, Leeds, LS1 5PN

Local Government Association published Supporting Inclusive Communities: Lesbians, Gay Men and Democracy. Guidelines for Local Authorities. Available from (0207) 664 3000 or www.lga.gov.gov.uk/lga/publicationslist.asp?ID=178

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Disclaimer: The inclusion of photographs of young people in this document should not be taken as an indication of their sexual orientation.