



Embedding LGBT+ Inclusivity in Scientific Workplaces: A Guide for Employers

“
28%
”

of LGBT+ respondents stated that they had at some point considered leaving their workplace because of the climate or discrimination towards LGBT+ people. Nearly half of all those who said they were trans had considered leaving their workplace because of the climate, with almost 20% of them considering this often. To create an environment where the best scientists can flourish and the best science can be done, everyone needs to feel comfortable in the workplace.

”



Introduction

This resource aims to equip individuals with change-making power in their organisations to use that power to champion a workplace that is inclusive and welcoming towards LGBT+ people.

Employers in STEM are diverse in structure; depending on your organisation, this resource may be useful for Human Resources managers, executive board members, and heads of department, as well as those responsible for technology solutions and site management. Managers of all kinds may also find this resource useful as a general overview of barriers that LGBT+ employees may encounter in the workplace.



Understanding discrimination and harassment

Discrimination against LGBT+ people can constitute treating someone differently because of their LGBT+ status, or applying a provision that puts someone at a disadvantage because of their LGBT+ status.

Harassment is defined as behaviour that violates someone's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them relating to LGBT+ status (even if the victim themselves is not LGBT+).

Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia can arise from prejudices held by individuals, but it may be helpful to think of them more generally as **systemic, structural forces** that oppress and marginalise LGBT+ people. The important thing here is that intent - or lack thereof - doesn't make a difference as to whether something is discriminatory. Organisations must actively audit policies, practices, and systems to ensure that they are not **indirectly discriminatory**

based on sexual orientation or trans status (or any other protected characteristic).

Individual or group actions may create a hostile environment, and therefore constitute harassment, whether or not this effect was intentional. Invasive questions relating to someone's LGBT+ status, repeated misgendering, or the perpetuation of offensive stereotypes are all examples of behaviour that might cause a hostile environment for LGBT+ people, even if done without intent. Behaviours do not have to be directed at a particular individual in order for them to constitute harassment, nor does the individual who experiences the hostile environment themselves need to be LGBT+. This means that for employers working to combat harassment, it is important to have and make use of tools such as training, guidance (like this toolkit), and explicit, well-publicised anti-discrimination policies.

Legal requirements

This section gives a brief overview of legal protections for LGBT+ people in the UK (as of August 2020).

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, indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. It also specifies that absence from work due to gender transition must legally be treated as equivalent to absence due to sickness or injury.

Further and higher education institutions, schools under local authorities, and other public sector employers and service providers have [additional duties](#) to tackle prejudice and advance equality of opportunity.

Data concerning a person's sexual orientation is defined as special category data in the UK and Europe under the [General Data Protection Regulation](#). Data relating to a trans person's gender history is also legally protected and should be treated confidentially; see our resource on [building trans-inclusive workplaces](#) for more information.

It's also important to note that while religion or belief (or lack thereof) is also a legally protected characteristic in the UK, 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.

For information on anti-discrimination protections internationally,
some useful sources are equaldex.com and stonewall.org.uk





Training that supports LGBT+ staff could be used more effectively in nearly all work environments. Respondents would value more practical training, particularly targeting negative or harmful behaviours, such as use of homophobic language or misuse of pronouns.



*Exploring the Workplace for
LGBT+ Physical Scientists report*



Inclusive policy and practice: a self-assessment framework

Non-discrimination policy and training

A generalised non-discrimination or equality and diversity **policy** is crucial, and more detailed or specific policies addressing LGBT+ equality and inclusion are often welcomed by LGBT+ employees.

- Does your organisation's non-discrimination/equality and diversity policy explicitly cover sexual orientation, and gender identity and/or expression?
- Is your organisation's non-discrimination policy made clearly available:
 - In employee handbooks and/or resource hubs?
 - To the wider public, particularly as part of recruitment?
 - In procurement policies, to ensure it is followed by those contracted to provide services for and/or work on behalf of your organisation?
 - When dealing with clients or partner organisations, including internationally?

- Does your organisation have any additional policies, such as LGBT+ equality or trans equality policies, that set out the issues pertaining to LGBT+ discrimination and harassment in greater detail?

Practical **training** equips an organisation to ensure that staff understand how they can contribute to a welcoming environment for LGBT+ employees, not just in the abstract but in practice.

- Does your new hire non-discrimination, dignity at work, or equality and diversity training include illustrative examples regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and/or expression?
- Does your supervisor/manager training include training on LGBT+ issues as a discrete topic (even if part of more general training)?
- Does the training provided address underrepresented LGBT+ identities, such as bi- and pansexuality, asexuality, and non-binary identity?
- Is training provided to equip individuals not only to avoid discriminatory behaviour themselves, but to proactively address it where they encounter it?

Equality of provision

Ensuring that **diverse families** are clearly included in policies relating to spouses and children is a necessary part of LGBT+ inclusion.

- Do parental leave policies explicitly cover adoption and surrogacy?
- Do family leave policies etc. explicitly cover domestic partners and civil partners as well as married spouses?

LGBT+ individuals, as well as those from other marginalised and/or underrepresented groups, often undertake significant **inclusion and diversity work**, such as informal mentoring of younger LGBT+ colleagues, or running staff networks. It should be made clear that LGBT+ inclusion is an organisational responsibility and should not have to fall on individual employees. Where individuals do choose to undertake this work, it can further impact negatively on their careers if it goes unrecognised or unrewarded.

- Is inclusion and diversity work built into the core responsibilities of key roles within the organisation – e.g. HR, communications, support, administration – to ensure that individual employees with marginalised identities don't feel pressured to undertake it themselves on top of their regular work?

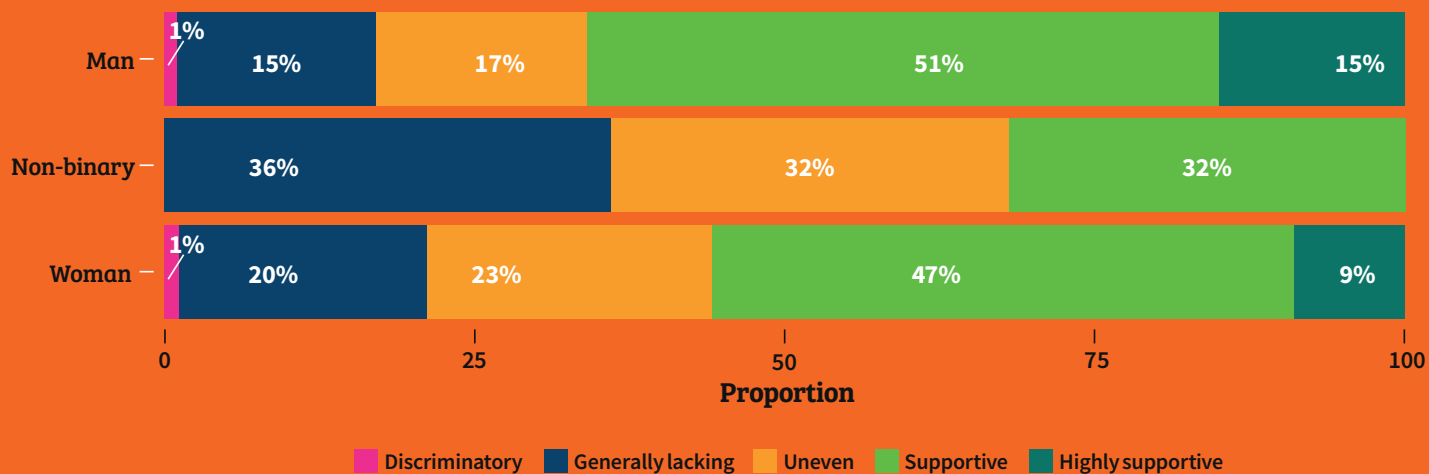
- Does your criteria for promotion and formal employee assessments value inclusion and diversity work comparably with, say, research or team management?
- Do awards and bonuses include recognition of inclusion and diversity work?"

Events and conferences aimed at minority groups, such as conferences for LGBT+ people in STEM, are increasingly prevalent. These are usually research-focused, like any other conference, but some individuals nonetheless find it more difficult to ask for support to attend LGBT+ events than is true for other kinds of professional development events.

- Is equality of support – leave allowance and funding – offered for professional development events aimed at minority groups and issues?
- Is it explicitly and widely advertised that equal support will be offered for these events?
- Are managers aware that they should treat such requests sensitively, knowing that the individuals asking may not be 'out' to colleagues and that their privacy should be respected?

Gender neutrality

Respondent perceptions of how supportive institutional policies are to LGBT+ people, by gender



Exploring the Workplace for
LGBT+ Physical Scientists report



Gender-neutral **language** is important for all LGBT+ people, as it avoids exclusionary language about employees or their spouses and partners. Some suggested substitutions:

INSTEAD OF
"He or she,"
"his or her"...

USE

**"They,"
"theirs"**

INSTEAD OF
"Men and women"

USE

**"Everyone,"
"employees of
all genders"**

INSTEAD OF
"Husband or wife"...

USE

**"Spouse,
partner, or
significant
other"**

INSTEAD OF
"Mother or
father"...

USE

**"Parent/
carer"**

INSTEAD OF
"Chairman"...

USE

**"chair"
"chairperson"**

INSTEAD OF
"Ladies and gentlemen"...

USE

**"Welcome
everyone,"
"guests and
colleagues"**

Dress codes are often gender neutral by default; however some organisations may have dress codes that specify two options, usually gendered male and female. This is sometimes true for formal events at educational institutions, such as graduation. If this is the case:

- Could the two options be replaced with more generalised, gender-neutral guidelines?
- Alternately, could the options be renamed 'option one' and 'option two' as opposed to 'male/female option'?
- Could flexibility be incorporated for those who prefer to dress androgynously, including non-binary individuals?

Access to toilet facilities is a crucial issue for trans and non-binary people, as well as for gender-non-conforming individuals who can experience gender policing in gendered spaces. Questions around toilets may extend to other gender-separated facilities, such as showers and changing rooms.

- Does your workplace provide gender-neutral toilets and facilities? If not, could some or all existing gendered facilities be made gender-neutral?

- This is simple to do for single-occupancy toilets. For multi-stall toilets it may be useful to indicate the nature of the facilities on the door sign, e.g. 'gender-neutral toilets: cubicles and urinals,' 'gender-neutral toilets: cubicles only.'
- It is not ideal for the only gender-neutral facilities to be those provided for disabled access, as it can imply an equivalence between being trans or non-binary and being disabled, as well as unnecessarily impeding disabled individuals who require use of the accessible toilets.
- Are gendered and non-gendered toilets adequately signposted, including on any maps of the premises as well as on internal signage?
- Where facilities are gendered, is your workplace clear that trans people should be able and made comfortable to use the facilities corresponding to their gender identity, not their sex assigned at birth?
 - One way to take a clear stance against gender policing in gendered spaces is to put up the **posters** from this toolkit.
 - Where toilets are gendered, are sanitary bins included in male facilities, so that trans men (and others who menstruate and use male facilities) are adequately provided for?

Trans inclusion

Trans and non-binary people face particular issues in the workplace, from unaccommodating administrative systems and facility provision through to interpersonal problems, such as ‘misgendering’ (incorrect use of pronouns or other gendered language to refer to a trans person). For more detailed information on the points below, see our resource on [building trans-inclusive workplaces](#).

- Do administrative systems allow for the provision of a preferred name, to be used in all instances except those where legal names are necessary?
- Do administrative systems allow for differences in recorded gender between e.g. gender identity, legal gender as recorded on passport or other documents, and legal gender as recorded by HMRC?
 - Note that the latter examples of legal gender may be different from each other, as changing each requires separate processes with different requirements. Legally registered gender should be considered sensitive information and should only be accessible to those who need it.
- Do administrative systems allow for recording gender as ‘non-binary’ and/or ‘other’?
 - A legally registered gender of male or female may also be required for tax/pension and legal/travel document purposes, but this should be considered sensitive information and should only be accessible to those who need it.
- Where honorifics/titles are recorded, do available options include gender-neutral titles such as ‘Mx,’ as well as the option for no title?
- Do administrative systems allow for individuals to record the gender pronouns they have identified as correct to refer to them with?
- Are administrative systems flexible and linked up, so that (both legal and preferred) name, gender, title and pronouns are easy to change across all systems at once?
- Is it necessary to ask for individuals to provide any past legal names during application or onboarding? Could this be avoided or made non-mandatory? If not, is it made clear why and how this information will be used, and is it treated sensitively and confidentially?
- Does your organisation have specific guidelines or a policy in place to help provide for employees who plan to transition?



The most concerning viewpoint is that of trans people, nearly half of whom had considered leaving their workplace because of the climate, with almost 20% of them considering this often.





The visibility of LGBT+ staff and supportive initiatives send strong signals of an inclusive environment. Survey participants also looked to social media, websites, print media and word of mouth to seek these indicators of support when judging how viable a workplace might be for them.



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



Support and communication

Diversity monitoring is a key way of measuring whether workplaces are welcoming and supportive to LGBT+ employees. Always ensure that diversity data is treated with the utmost sensitivity, and with GDPR compliance.

- Are questions on sexual orientation and gender identity/trans status included, but optional, on all relevant forms?
- Are anonymous diversity monitoring/employee climate surveys undertaken that allow individuals to identify as LGBT+?

LGBT+ networks can be important sources of practical and wellbeing support for LGBT+ staff, as well as providing valuable insight and means of communication between staff and the organisation.

- Does your organisation have an LGBT+ staff network or affinity group?
- Is this network formalised, supported by HR, and well-advertised?
- Is this network fully inclusive to individuals of all LGBT+ identities?

Visibility and communication of resources, initiatives, and sources of support is just as crucial as having them in place to begin with. This should be both internal and external, as prospective applicants who are LGBT+ often make decisions on the basis of how LGBT+-friendly they feel a workplace is likely to be.

- Is there a specific LGBT+ section in your employee handbook and organisational intranet?
- Are LGBT+ resources and initiatives well-publicised both internally, e.g. within organisation-wide communications, and externally, e.g. on websites and social media?
- Does your organisation signpost to external resources and initiatives, such as articles, hashtags, networks and events relating to being LGBT+ in STEM?
- Do senior-level staff at your organisation explicitly champion LGBT+ initiatives?"

Reporting and Feedback Frameworks

Fostering bottom-up as well as top-down communication is a crucial part of creating a truly diverse and inclusive workplace. Employers should proceed from the grounding principle that any member of staff who chooses to speak out about something causing them harm as a marginalised person – whether a particular incidence of behaviour, or an organisational practice or norm – should be believed, listened to, and assured that action will be taken. Proactive steps should be taken to create an environment where staff feel confident and supported raising all kinds of issues. This includes microaggressions*, which – as the *Exploring the Workplace*

for LGBT+ Physical Scientists report clearly shows – can have devastating cumulative effects on LGBT+ scientists.

Employees should understand clearly the process of raising and reporting issues and incidents, and who they should speak to. It's important for this to include paths other than via their own line manager, for a number of reasons: the issue may be with the line manager's behaviour, or the employee may not be out as LGBT+ to their line manager, for example. It should also be clear and transparent what steps will, or can, be taken in response to a complaint.

Key questions:

- Do your employees - as well as any contractors, service users, or external clients - know how to report homophobic, biphobic and transphobic discrimination and harassment?
- Do they feel secure and supported in doing so and do they have options to do so anonymously?
- Are they encouraged and empowered to speak up about microaggressions and general workplace climate, as well as more serious incidents?
- Is there a transparent process regarding what steps will follow when an issue is raised?
- Are employees signposted towards routes to talk and seek support, whether or not they choose to report an incident?
 - The RSC [bullying and harassment support line](#), for anyone in the chemical sciences affected by bullying or harassment, is a helpful resource to signpost
- Is there a person at senior management level in your organisation whose job it is to take direct responsibility for issues relating to LGBT+ inclusivity?

In addition to making sure existing systems are robust and conducive to inclusion and diversity in the workplace, it can be helpful to investigate other means of issue-reporting or gathering employee feedback. Offer multiple channels or mechanisms through which marginalised people can raise issues or ask questions. Inviting – and taking action in response to – employee feedback on a regular basis also helps to increase engagement and trust throughout the organisation. The following subsections present some suggestions for feedback and reporting systems that can help to facilitate healthy and open workplace cultures where employees are encouraged to speak out.



microaggressions

Brief and subtle behaviours that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages towards marginalised groups. Microaggressions are small-scale and often unintentional, but can build up to create a hostile environment for LGBT+ people. Examples might include heteronormative assumptions, erasing or invalidating particular LGBT+ identities, or reinforcing stereotypes or generalisations about LGBT+ people.

See the full glossary in this toolkit



EMBEDDING LGBT+ INCLUSIVITY IN SCIENTIFIC WORKPLACES:
A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS





Throughout the interviews, participants came back to the idea of **“death by a thousand cuts”** repeatedly, talking about how “harmful humour” was often a norm in their workplaces...

The actions that most commonly contribute to a hostile environment for LGBT+ people are frequently small but numerous. Often it is **smaller, day-to-day interactions** that can. These actions might seem inconsequential to the antagonist and might be unintentional, but they leave lasting impact on LGBT+ employees. **We need to audit workplace environments to address the small daily actions that can build up to create hostility.**



Anonymous reporting

End-to-end anonymous systems allow for individuals to record experiences or feelings relating to diversity issues and discrimination that they may not wish to raise, or feel comfortable raising, in another context. Anonymous reporting systems can then serve as a workplace climate audit, identify where more training is needed, or feed into further research to identify areas of change that need to be made in an organisation - racismatcambridge.org is a great example of this. Alternatively, use a two-way secure system such as allvoices.co or vaultplatform.com which allow for a dialogue, enabling specific incidences to be directly dealt with if wished.

Benefits

- Allows for a truly frank and honest audit of workplace climate
- Allows for issues to be platformed that individuals might not necessarily have reported otherwise, e.g. microaggressions
- Can generate data to help shape and drive particular initiatives
- Gives individuals an opportunity to feel heard if they aren't comfortable raising issues with colleagues or managers, e.g. if they are closeted and doing so might out them as LGBT+
- Builds trust and encourages a 'speak up' culture.

Consider

- It should be made clear what the purpose and limitations of a particular anonymous reporting system are, and the available alternatives
- Anonymous reporting systems should supplement, not replace, clear and well-communicated non-anonymous complaints processes
- It may be desirable to require authentication that someone is a member of the organisation as part of the reporting process, and means of ensuring anonymity with this should be considered carefully
- Staff who deal with reports should receive in-depth training and welfare support.



Employee focus groups/roundtables

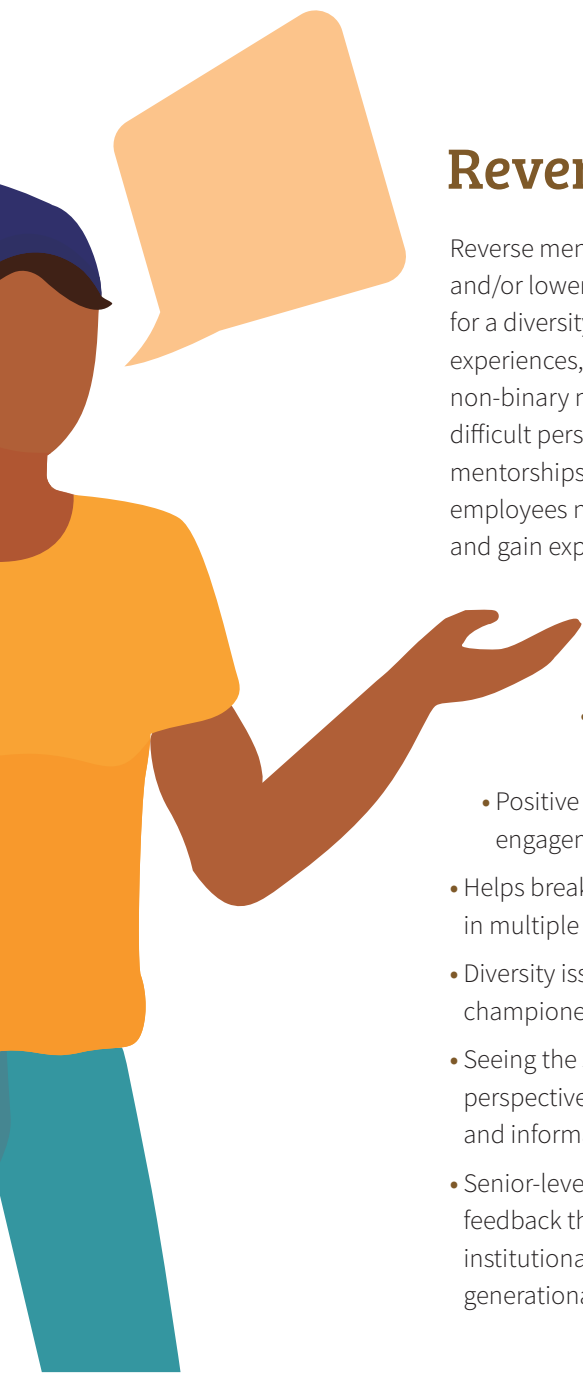
Focus groups or roundtables are consultation groups of employees that senior-level staff meet with directly on a one-off or regular basis. If your organisation has an LGBT+ staff network, this might be a starting point for a focus group. Meetings should be openly advertised and structured to create an atmosphere where staff feel able to raise concerns relating to LGBT+ inclusion in the organisation.

Benefits

- Creates a sense of positive accountability for the organisation
- ‘Safety in numbers’ means individuals may feel more comfortable speaking about their issues where they know others with similar experiences will support them
- Senior-level staff can gain more direct feedback than that which comes through institutional hierarchies
- Creates an opportunity for direct communication and explanation of executive decision-making relevant to the LGBT+ or other particular community. Increases transparency.

Consider

- Not all LGBT+ employees will feel comfortable with participating in a focus group - care should be taken to solicit anonymous or confidential input from employees who are closeted or otherwise uncomfortable participating, either via an LGBT+ staff network in advance, or by other means such as anonymous staff surveys
- Individuals may find sharing personal experiences distressing; follow-up welfare support (e.g. staff counselling) should be available and communicated to
- Meetings should be carefully structured and clear goals, expectations, and evaluation tools should be set
- Ideally a lower-level rather than a senior employee should chair the meeting. Issues raised should be actively followed up with attendees and/or the wider organisation.



Reverse mentoring

Reverse mentoring is a scheme that reverses traditional mentoring relationships, pairing newer and/or lower-level employees acting as mentors with senior-level staff as mentees. The aim for a diversity-motivated reverse mentoring scheme should be to pair individuals with differing experiences, e.g. gay, lesbian or bisexual mentors with heterosexual mentees, transgender or non-binary mentors with cisgender mentees. However, it should be made clear that sharing difficult personal experiences with marginalisation is not expected or necessary. Reverse mentorships can be mutually beneficial partnerships, as senior-level staff understand what their employees need and what issues are important to them, while employees build relationships and gain experience that can aid their career.

Benefits

- Employees feel trusted, listened to, and empowered
- Positive impacts on retention and engagement
- Helps break down stereotypes, potentially in multiple directions
- Diversity issues can be understood and championed from above
- Seeing the same situation from different perspectives can be especially productive and informative from multiple directions
- Senior-level staff can gain more direct feedback than that which comes through institutional hierarchies. Helps break down generational gaps.

Consider

- Partners should be matched with careful consideration
- Mentors should be trained in order to build confidence, to help structure successful mentoring sessions, and to work through potential challenges
- Mentees should be committed to the relationship, and encouraged to be honest about their vulnerabilities and areas where they have a lack of knowledge or understanding.
- Clear goals, expectations, and evaluation tools should be set.

Shadow/mirror board

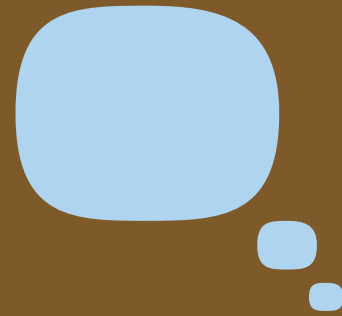
A shadow board or mirror board is an executive board made up of lower-level staff that mirrors and feeds directly into the main executive board of the organisation. The shadow board or mirror board might receive the same papers as the executive board, or might be tasked with focusing on particular areas. A diversity-motivated shadow board should be an opportunity for employees from minority groups to bring their experiences and perspectives to the table, explicitly recognising that issues of inclusion and diversity run through many/most high-level organisational decisions and can sometimes be overlooked at this level without direct representation of diverse experiences.

Benefits

- Lower-level employees feel trusted, listened to, and empowered
- Positive impacts on retention and engagement. Increased visibility and professional development for newer employees which can aid their career
- Colleagues may be able to raise issues arising from their own experiences with shadow board members that they do not feel comfortable speaking about with managers or senior-level staff; these can then be taken forward
- Shadow board members can aid communication of executive board decisions to staff at all levels and explain decisions
- Increases transparency.

Consider

- Diversity is key
- In smaller organisations and educational institutions, allowing anyone who wants to be part of the shadow board may be a productive approach; in larger organisations, the selection processes should be open-application and diversity-focused
- Representational quotas or guidelines might be an option to ensure minority groups are adequately represented
- Clear goals, expectations, and evaluation tools should be set.



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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