



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

# Understanding Barriers and Opportunities to get more people from the LGBTQ+ Community active in the West Midlands Combined Authority Geography

**Pride  
Sports**  
LGBTIQ+ Sports inclusion



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# Introduction

This report examines barriers and facilitators to participation in sport and physical activity for LGBTQ+ people living in the West Midlands. By LGBTQ+ we mean lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning people. The + represents a multitude of other non-heterosexual, non-cisgender identities covered by the LGBTQ+ umbrella.

Throughout the report, the acronym LGBTQ+ is used unless it is referring to a report or data which uses another acronym. For example, when the report mentions Pride Sports, the author, it refers to 'LGBTIQ+' as this is the acronym used in the organisation's title. Additionally, Pride Sports works to a definition of LGBTQ+ inclusion, as a means by which LGBTQ+ people feel welcomed, valued, respected and supported to achieve their best. Whilst the findings of this report come from LGBTQ+ people in the West Midlands themselves, Pride Sports assumes that where people refer to 'LGBTQ+ inclusion', they are broadly referring to the definition outlined above.

A glossary of terms can be found as an appendix to the report.

# Background

Pride Sports, the LGBTIQ+ sports development and inclusion organisation for England was contracted by the West Midlands Combined Authority to learn about barriers and opportunities to get more people from the LGBTQ+ community active in the West Midlands Combined Authority Region as a legacy of the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Birmingham 2022 provided a major events milestone for delivering a more inclusive and accessible games, including a new Pride Network, a Pride House, athletes "coming out" and strong statements at the Opening and Closing ceremony objecting to homophobic behaviour and attitudes from Athletes and Federations.

With the influence of the West Midlands Mayor and set in the context of the Legacy programmes of the Games, Pride Sports began a conversation with LGBTQ+ people in the West Midlands on behalf of the WMCA, about provision for this community based on lived experience.

The purpose of the work was to understand personal views & experiences of taking part in sport and physical activity in the West Midlands and how encourage behaviour change to get more LGBTQ+ people active. It required an honest conversation about the value of a legacy for sport and physical activity that can then offer a clear understanding of the immediate thinking on any barriers, good practice and opportunities across the region.





# Context

In the 2021 Census **3.2% of the population** in England and Wales identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another sexual orientation nationally. 1.5% of respondents identified as gay or lesbian while 1.3% identified as bisexual. A further 0.3% of people identified with a different sexual orientation. The most common 'other' orientations given in the write-in box were pansexual, asexual, and queer. A further 7.5% chose not to answer the question. Those aged 16-24 were most likely to identify as LGB+ in some way (6.91%). Meanwhile, **0.5% said their gender identity and sex registered at birth were different.**

However, this data is likely to be under-representative as 2021 was the first time that these questions had been asked in a census. For example, a YouGov survey in 2019 highlighted 16% of 16-24 year olds identifying as bisexual<sup>1</sup>.

In the West Midlands, concentrations of LGB+ people can be found in Birmingham, Coventry and Walsall, whilst those with a gender different from their sex assigned at birth are more spread out across the region, with concentrations in Birmingham and Coventry<sup>2</sup>.

Reports suggest that LGBTQ+ people face a unique exposure to stress, which is compounded by prejudice, discrimination, sexual orientation concealment, expectations of rejection, and internalised stigma. This unique set of circumstances means that LGBTQ+ people are two and a half times more likely to have a lifetime history of mental health issues in comparison to heterosexual groups.

These health inequalities are not exclusive to the adult population. Young LGBTQ+ people are also more at risk of experiencing poorer mental and physical health in comparison to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts. Experiences of discrimination and lack of acceptance within the school environment and at home can lead to higher incidences of self-harm, suicide attempts and bouts of depression<sup>3</sup>.

Trans people face unique inequalities in relation to employment and the workplace, healthcare access, leisure and education<sup>4</sup>. Recent years have seen a number of federations and national governing bodies place significant restrictions and sometimes bans on trans women competing in sport. The reporting of this along with other negative stories in the media, focusing on these issues, has been shown to have an impact on trans young people's comfort with participation in sport<sup>5</sup>.

Meanwhile, issues facing non-binary people in sport and physical activity are outlined in a 2019 report from Pride Sports, commissioned by Sport England<sup>6</sup>.

Whilst Sport England's data shows a mixed picture on LGBTQ+ people and physical activity<sup>7</sup>, previous studies have raised concern about levels of physical activity amongst LGBTQ+ populations. A survey of nearly 1,000 LGBT people living in England undertaken in 2015<sup>8</sup>, asking both about sport participation and other physical activity found that:

- 55% of LGBT men were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 33% of men in the general population.
- 56% of LGBT women were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 45% of women in the general population.
- 64% of LGBT people who identified as something other than male or female (e.g. non-binary, genderfluid or genderqueer) were not active enough to maintain good health.



In addition, research commissioned by Pride Sports and Sport England on 'LGBT Participation in Sport and Physical Activity' in 2017<sup>9</sup> found that:

- LGBTQ+ people are more likely to feel intimidation and wrestle with guilt.
- Participation in 'traditional' competitive sports is low among LGBTQ+ groups, with a preference for other physical activities instead.
- LGBTQ+ people favour more solitary activities which do not have as many negative associations, such as walking, running, swimming.
- All LGBTQ+ groups describe secondary school sporting experiences very negatively – particularly gay men & people who identified as something other than LGBT (asexual, pansexual, queer). These same negative experiences in school can have a hugely destabilising impact on participation later in life.
- Many LGBTQ+ people aren't out in the sport they take part in (bisexual men 22%, lesbians 56%, trans women 61%)
- Mental health and wellbeing is critical to an LGBTQ+ audience, 21% of respondents identified as having a mental health issue compared with a Nat Rep response of 5%

The study also concluded that most LGBTQ+ respondents see LGBTQ+ inclusion actions in mainstream

sport as a priority for achieving greater participation amongst LGBTQ+ people, whereas younger people and those who identified as something other than LGBT (asexual, pansexual, queer) saw LGBTQ+ specific provision as a solution to overcoming barriers.

A 'Review of LGBT+ Sport and Physical Activity Infrastructure' undertaken by Nottingham Business School and commissioned by Pride Sports and Sport England in 2017<sup>9</sup>, found that mainstream sports provision generally lacks insight into LGBTQ+ participation. It also found that LGBTQ+ specific sports groups provide a specific and valuable context which encourages LGBTQ+ participation at varying levels of activity. However, it also acknowledged that there are considerable gaps in the delivery of these groups both in terms of geographical distribution and demographic distribution. For example, a quick search on the Pride Sports LGBTQ+ Club Finder shows that of the thirteen LGBTQ+ sports groups in the region, only two exist outside Birmingham.

LGBTQ+ sports groups were found to not deliver provision evenly across the LGBTQ+ spectrum. For example, provision for trans and non- binary participants was found to be minimal in both mainstream and LGBTQ+ sports provision, with many barriers to provision and participation over and above those faced by the wider LGBTQ+ population. LGBTQ+ sports groups were found to be often small, community-based organisations lacking resources and capacity to deliver their provision.

Umbrella groups, which play a co-ordinating role for some LGBTQ+ sports groups, such as the recently formed Midlands Sport Pride Network, were also examined for their ability to spot and address any gaps in this provision and to give resource and capacity to individual LGBTQ+ sports groups and the report recommended further investigation and investment into these organisations.

Activate, an initiative delivered by Birmingham LGBT, with funding from Sport England, was mentioned in this context within the report. However, this project came to an end in 2019, once funding from Sport England had ended.

Meanwhile, a 2019 study by Bournemouth University for Energise Me, Hampshire's Active Partnership, 'Pride in Our Workforce'<sup>10</sup> which explored the role of the workforce in relation to LGBT+ sport and physical activity participation, found that:

- LGBTQ+ people were less likely to occupy sport and physical activity workforce roles than heterosexual people.
- LGBTQ+ workforce members displayed more varied responses in relation to comfort in expressing sexual or gender identity in their workforce role. Women who identified as lesbian were more likely to report feeling uncomfortable to express their sexual identity

- LGBTQ+ communities care less about the qualifications or experience of workforce members. A workforce perceived to be approachable and inclusive is a critical part of engaging with LGBT+ communities.
- The workforce requires role models, from elite through to grassroots physical activity and sport. Participants wanted to see more openly LGBT+ leaders at elite and grassroots
- Workforce members require training and upskilling to avoid the use of LGBT+phobic language, and other discriminatory behaviours.
- Workforce members need to confidently address discrimination, harassment and abuse when it occurs.
- Study participants felt that visible symbols of inclusion are important aspects of venue and workforce marketing.

- Some venues were perceived to be unsafe and exclusionary because of the built environment and nature of class/group sessions. For example, non-binary and transgender participants spoke about fears when using traditionally gendered changing spaces.



# West Midlands Insight



This project, which sought to understand barriers and opportunities to get more LGBTQ+ people active in the West Midlands Combined Authority region involved the following outputs to engage the LGBTQ+ community and its Allies in a series of conversational platforms.

- 1** 3 open **Round Table** events across the region
- 2** A **survey** to enhance learnings from face-to-face engagements.
- 3** **One to one** conversations with former youth athletes
- 4** **National Governing Bodies of Sport** and their work relating to LGBTQ+ inclusion in the West Midlands.
- 5** **Recommendations** based on local insight and understanding.

# 1. Round Tables

Three round tables were planned during the project period, the first in Birmingham at Alexander stadium, the second in Wolverhampton at Pride House and the final one at Warwick University.

Ultimately, only two of the round tables took place, with the third being cancelled due to low numbers of registrations, despite outreach to local networks and community organisations alongside paid promotion from Pride Sports social media accounts.

This roundtable was subsequently replaced with a roundtable of young people at the Birmingham Association of Youth Clubs (BAYC) Out Group.

In total 40 people attended the open roundtable discussions. Participants in Birmingham largely represented LGBTQ+ sports groups from the city, whilst the second reflected a more diverse group, including inactive LGBTQ+ people.

Discussions at **roundtable one** focused on the following questions:

- How can we make our West Midlands facilities and spaces more inclusive to LGBTQ+ people?

- How do we increase visibility of LGBTQ+ sporting role models in the West Midlands community?

- How can we promote inclusivity and acceptance in sport in the West Midlands?

Whilst **roundtable two** used the conversations from roundtable one as a platform for discussion. Responses to these questions and further discussion can be summarised by the following themes:

## Making West Midlands facilities and spaces more inclusive to LGBTQ+ people

**Education of workforce on LGBTQ+ inclusion** in general and trans inclusion more specifically was seen as imperative. It was suggested that an accreditation scheme for sport and leisure facilities is launched, and ambassadors appointed to represent facilities and spaces to LGBTQ+ communities and populations.

Participants felt that **communication was key** in making LGBTQ+ people aware of what is on offer in the West Midlands, as this population may feel alienated from organised sport and physical activity due to earlier experiences. The need for an LGBTQ+ inclusive communications strategy was highlighted, one which reflects



LGBTQ+ populations and people and which focuses on welcoming people into the sector. It was felt that visibility is key in making LGBTQ+ feel welcome, but that any visible promotion should reflect good practice, not be a substitute for it.

**Representation in sector decision making** was seen as important. Roundtable participants asked if LGBTQ+ people are currently represented in regional decision-making processes and how can they become more involved in this space.

The issue of **changing rooms and facilities** was highlighted, with an emphasis on a population for whom 'safe space' (which is a recurrent theme throughout the consultations) is particularly important. It was recommended that toilet and changing facilities should be offered as gender neutral or to offer at least some gender-free toilets and changing spaces. (Changing villages with individual changing cubicles were mentioned in the later survey)

In terms of **getting LGBTQ+ people active**, social aspects to provision was considered important. An offer which has the capacity to build friendships and connection can be motivating to what can be a significantly dispersed LGBTQ+ population. Individual sports may be initially more appealing to this population, and the group felt that any pathway towards greater, more diverse engagement, cannot be rushed. For example, initial

accessible offers could evolve - a walking group into jogging, solo cycling into group cycling.

It was felt that more work needed to be done to **make parks and other informal spaces safer** for LGBTQ+ people, as these spaces often aren't considered when thinking about facilities and venues.

The issue of kit was also raised in terms of LGBTQ+ participants feeling the need to 'fit in'. How does WMCA create a sector where LGBTQ+ people, particularly those who are gender non-conforming, feel comfortable to participate?

**Reporting and sanctioning** were also mentioned. LGBTQ+ people need reassurance that any negative incidents they encounter will be dealt with appropriately. Indeed, this could be one aspect of the accreditation scheme mentioned above.

Finally, it was suggested that **visible signs of LGBTQ+ inclusion** needed to be displayed at venues which had worked on LGBTQ+ inclusion. Again, this could be part of the accreditation scheme above, in which clubs, facilities and groups can show a visible sign that they have completed a learning pathway on LGBTQ+ inclusion.



## How can we promote inclusivity and acceptance in sport in the West Midlands?



### Education of mainstream sport

was seen as key here, with the suggestion of an education programme devised by the Midland Sports Pride Network, a recently formed network of LGBTQ+ sport and physical activity groups. This included the provision of a toolkit (potentially the accreditation scheme mentioned above) for facilities, spaces, and agencies such as active partnerships. There was concern that any work in this space needed to address all barriers and aspects of LGBTQ+ inclusion, e.g. include consideration of the needs of trans and non-binary people and that any education work needed to address some of the trauma of early sports experiences of this population.

It was felt that WMCA's work in this space needs to recognise that the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ people are initiated early in life and can then be added to when LGBTQ+ people seek to return to activity in adulthood. Generic inclusive approaches currently offered by some providers don't take account of the participant, any previous trauma associated with sport and their journey. It

was felt that there is always a 'risk' attached to engagement with mainstream sport. Participants asked themselves whether they would you be welcomed as an LGBTQ+ person and agreed that it can be difficult to be authentic in mainstream sport.

It was suggested that change start with **educating the workforce** who are the first point of contact, who should understand the needs and potential experience of those LGBTQ+ people new to the sport and physical activity space. The 'Welcome' is key! It was suggested that WMCA develop training templates and/or good practice examples. WMCA was also seen to have a role in supporting private and independent providers across the region to be more inclusive in their provision and delivery.

It was suggested that more thought could be put into the use of social media and other **communications strategies to reach LGBTQ+ audiences.**

A way of bringing clubs together in a show of unity and solidarity was suggested, along with visible **ambassadors and allies from clubs.**

Pride Sports was reminded that any strategies need to work for the entire West Midlands Combined Authority geography and not just for Birmingham.

## LGBTQ+ Community Sport



**Sport offered by LGBTQ+ communities themselves was valued**, but the capacity limitations of the LGBTQ+ community sport and physical activity sector was noted. It was felt that there are huge opportunities for networking and skill sharing amongst these groups, but that isn't currently happening, in part due to capacity and lack of structure (something the Midland Sport Pride Network is hoping to address).

Empowering LGBTQ+ communities, or community development in relation to sport and physical activity was also seen as important, alongside the need to develop a greater understanding of who LGBTQ+ communities are within the Combined Authority geography.

To encourage the growth of the LGBTQ+ sport sector, it was suggested by roundtable participants that facilities and spaces should be made available to LGBTQ+ groups at subsidised rates and ring-fenced times (Of course, this may be difficult to achieve in real terms, but WMCA could have a role in communicating the needs of the LGBTQ+ sector to local authorities and other partners).

It was felt that there could be better links between LGBTQ+ sports groups and mainstream sport.

## Visibility of LGBTQ+ sporting role models in the West Midlands community



These discussions focused on who was thought of as a role model and how they might be platformed. There was general consensus that role models should be identified across sports and that these role models shouldn't just be performance athletes but should include coaches and officials and indeed clubs themselves. All sports need to be represented – team sport and individual sports.

Role models should come from community sport as well as mainstream sport, and the WMCA could play a role in providing a platform for community athletes to tell their stories. The LGBTQ+ sports community was seen as a role model in itself.

### BAYC youth group roundtable



This roundtable involved eleven participants aged 15 – 25 of different genders.

None of the participants were currently accessing any organised sports activity, although three participants were taking part in social physical activity, for example climbing, hiking and walking as their preferred activity.

More than half the young people were taking part in physical activity less than 60 minutes a week, the majority of these (5) for



less than 30 minutes a week. Young people were asked what has stopped them getting involved in sport and physical activity at present or in the past. The term 'embarrassed' was used to describe various aspects of engagement, including elements of the space, people, and culture of organised sport.

For example, one young person spoke about their experience of participating in a team sport and coaches making assumptions about their athletic ability based on their appearance. As they "didn't look like [they] could play", they were always picked last.

Based very much on their experiences of school PE and sport, the young people also felt that sport can be 'over gendered', overly competitive and that young people might receive unwanted attention from heterosexual people. They were also concerned about the gendered nature of 'uniforms' (kit).

Being older young people, they felt that trying to re-engage with sport at this age would be 'embarrassing', and that they

needed a 'clean start' where beginners activity was provided to people their age.

Asked what an inclusive sport and physical activity environment would look like for them, young people responded that this would need to be cheaper than it currently is and be offered as a social activity. It would need to be trans-inclusive and involve a welcome from confident LGBTQ+ leaders, a place where young people didn't feel judged, received support and their privacy was respected.

Young people also strongly favoured individual sports and activities over team sports, with a preference for activities such as hiking, climbing, ice skating and rollerblading.

In terms of a strategy for the West Midlands, young people wanted to see **the LGBTQ+ community actively promoted in all its diversity**. They wanted to see some **LGBTQ+ specific offers that were affordable, alongside education for coaches and sport and physical activity** providers more generally.

## 2. Survey

Between December 2023 and January 2024, an online survey was opened and circulated across LGBTQ+ networks in the West Midlands, including:

- Pride House leadership, Advisory Board
- Midland Sports Pride Network
- Proud Baggies (West Bromwich Albion's LGBTQ+ supporters group)
- Villa and proud (Aston Villa's LGBTQ+ supporters group)
- Warwick Pride
- Warwick university staff and student LGBTQ+ networks
- Coventry Council LGBTQ+ staff network
- University of Birmingham LGBTQ+ staff and allies network

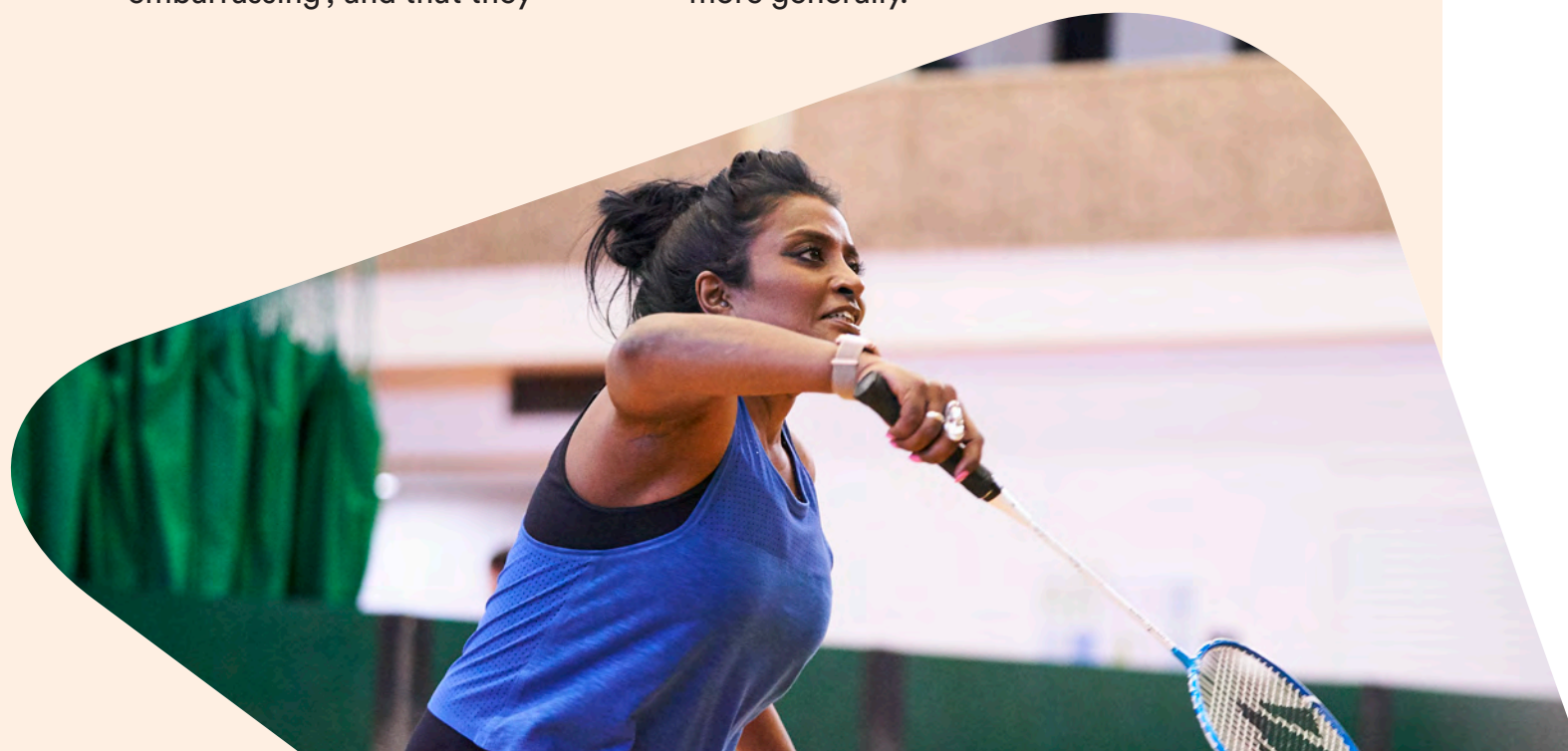
The survey was completed by 124 respondents, although not all questions were mandatory and therefore not all responses were complete.

49% of respondents identified as male, 43% identified as female, 7% identified as non-binary and 1% identified as something else. 10% of respondents identified their gender as different from that they were assigned at birth and 15% of respondents identified in some way as disabled.

In terms of ethnicity, white respondents over-indexed, with 91% of respondents identifying as white in some way, compared to 77% of people regionally.

61% of respondents were aged 25-34 and 42% of respondents were currently part of a sports group.

The survey asked a series of qualitative questions, which participants were able to choose to answer or not, as relevant.



The survey initially asked **what motivates respondents to get active**. This question received sixty-six responses in total highlighting the following factors as important in order of the number of times they were mentioned by respondents (in some cases respondents reported more than one motivator):

## What motivates you to get active?

“Body image, mental health”

“My health and well-being, physical and mental. An awareness that multiple studies have the benefits of regular physical activity as you age”

“Keeping fit and healthily being social, opportunity to ‘clear my head’. And a sense of self confidence that comes from being fit. I take comfort in the knowledge if i was ever attacked for being LGBTQIA I could probably outrun them.”

- 1 Physical health (22)
- 2 Fitness (18)
- 3 Mental health/wellbeing (15)
- 4 Social aspects (11)
- 5 Feeling good (10)
- 6 Weight management (8)
- 7 Looking Good (6)
- 8 Ageing (6)
- 9 Self-confidence (3)
- 10 Competition (3)
- 11 Cycle commuting (3)

“Cost, time and unaware of any LGBT clubs in my area”

## If you don't do any sport or physical activity what stops you?

“Autistic inertia, sensory issues, fatigue, ADHD lack of focus. The things I am interested in are expensive and I feel like they are not accessible to a dyspraxic person with poor coordination”

“I have never had a good relationship with sport, I associate it with bullying and bad PE lessons at school. I enjoyed swimming, but time and physical appearance put me off going”

For those not currently engaged in sport and physical activity, survey participants were asked the following question: **If you don't do any sport or physical activity what stops you?**

There were thirty-six responses, with **disability** being the most common barrier mentioned (8) with **cost** a close second (7). **Time** was also a consideration (5), whilst **previous negative experience, no suitable offer for age/ability and injury** (3). **Mental health** was mentioned by two participants, as were **work and lack of motivation**. Other issues mentioned were lack of access to appropriate changing facilities for non-binary people, lack of friends to go with and lack of sports ‘just for fun’.

Those currently participating in sports groups were asked **what they liked the most about their sports club and what makes it inclusive?** There were thirty-two responses to this question, with several themes emerging.

The most common factors mentioned were **friendly, welcoming and non-judgmental environments** (12). This was followed by an appreciation of an **offer for 'all abilities'** (6). **Social reasons**, such as 'fellowship' were also rated highly (5). **Diversity and accessibility** were also valued (3), whilst the same number of respondents cited an **LGBTQ+ specific environment**. Slightly less (2) mentioned a large LGBTQ+ presence at their club, whilst the same number mentioned 'safety' and non-gendered organisation. Equally, the quality of coaching was also valued (2 respondents).

"Open to people of all abilities, whether a novice or more experienced"

"Everyone is super friendly and supportive of each other, very inclusive"

## What did you like most about your sports club and what makes it inclusive?

"Everyone is non-judgemental and it feels like a safe space"

"Ones which feel non-judgemental. Inclusive of all. Family feeling when you walk in"

"I get very anxious around sports and feel judged. I like to keep my head down and get in and out, I feel like everyone thinks I look ridiculous..."

## What kind of environment would help you do more?

All respondents were asked **'What kind of environment would help you do more?'** This question yielded 59 Responses, with several themes emerging.

Ten respondents used the word **'non-judgemental'** to describe a space that would help them do more, whilst nine used the word **'inclusive'**. Four respondents talked about **'welcoming'** spaces, sessions for beginners and lower costs, whilst three would welcome LGBTQ+ specific sessions, and more time to participate. Two respondents referred to **inclusive changing facilities, safety** and the **opportunity for one-to-one support**.

In addition, several respondents also referred to **self-consciousness** in relation to their bodies or **appearance** as part of their response to this question.

"I don't find sport facilities to be welcoming places, they have associations with toxic masculinity. Gay community groups who might be more welcoming have similar issues around appearance and body size that also put me off Gay sports groups. Environments would need to be truly mixed LGBTQ+, with LGBTQ+ staff and supportive of diverse bodies"

"Something where we don't look like a sideshow!"



Survey participants were also asked: **How would you describe an inclusive LGBTQ+ physical activity environment which encourages more people to be active and confident?**

67 participants responded with the following main themes emerging in order of prevalence:

## How would you describe an inclusive LGBTQ+ physical activity environment?

“It allows people to feel more welcome in sport and not judged. It makes us feel like we can sports no matter who we are”

“Friendly, welcoming and non-judgmental”

“Somewhere where you can be yourself without any judgement or discrimination.”

Other factors mentioned were diversity, fun, reporting systems for when things go wrong, social aspects, and mental health support.

- 1 Welcoming/friendly (12)
- 2 Non-judgemental (10)
- 3 Environments which communicate their LGBTQ+ inclusion (10)
- 4 Non-gendered provision (6)
- 5 LGBTQ+ specific provision (6)
- 6 No exclusion (5)
- 7 Workforce development (5)
- 8 Safety (5)
- 9 All ability (4)
- 10 Access for disabled people (4)
- 11 Individual, non-gendered changing (3)

“I think it would be immensely beneficial for the LGBTQ community to have a range of sports activities that provide a social element outside of, but perhaps complementary to, the usual LGBTQ scene”

“Like any such ambitions, it needs to be a suite of things as this means different things to different people. In some areas it should be LGBTQ+ focussed or specific activities, in other areas it’s about embedding [good practice]”

The final question survey participants were asked was **“Describe what a West Midlands LGBTQ+ sport legacy could look like and mean to your community?”**.

This yielded 56 individual and varied responses, but with some themes emerging. The strongest themes were - **creating inclusive environments in mainstream sport (10 respondents)** and **more LGBTQ+ inclusive clubs (8 respondents)**. Other themes with less consensus included - **promotion of LGBTQ+ athletes (4 respondents)**, whilst three respondents mentioned the need for an offer as an alternative to bars and the commercial ‘scene’, anti-discrimination work and combining sports and social opportunities. Additional suggestions included more accessible information for LGBTQ+ people as well as taster events.

## Describe what a West Midlands LGBTQ+ sport legacy could look like and mean to your community?

“It could really help, especially with some discussions that have happened in the past few years in relation to trans inclusion in sports and in the Olympics. Someone needs to lead the way for a more inclusive sport environment to show that it can be done”

“Birmingham has so much potential to be the centre for LGBTQ+ sportspeople. We have so many sports teams, so many fan groups all within a small area. Why not utilise this and make the West Midlands the place to come for inclusive sport”

“It could be useful to have an organisation that would support local gyms, “teach” them how to reach out to LGBTQ+ people, and encourage diversity in their membership”

At the end of the survey, participants were also given the opportunity to **add their own comments**. The following represents a sample of feedback:

“Fatt Projects ran a queer, size inclusive swimming party with access in mind this summer and it was the most popular event I saw in the community. There is a real need for it”

“Can someone please research how to get neurodivergent people more active and to eat healthier. Sensory issues and same/safe foods are massive barriers to us and neurodivergent people die earlier”

“I know a lot of people who didn’t go to anything during the Commonwealth Games in Bham because at the same time loads of sporting bodies were banning trans people from competing at certain levels. I myself didn’t go because I felt like the games weren’t for me. If you want to get people like me more into sport, then I think you need to prove to trans people that you don’t agree with how we’re being treated by various sporting bodies”

“Just that there’s a huge opportunity to use sport as a means of developing a fully inclusive region. Manchester/ London are seen as inclusive areas - West Midlands unfortunately isn’t ...Let the West Midlands lead the way when it comes to sports inclusivity. There’s a huge gap and a huge opportunity!!”

“To promote sports for the LGBTQ+ community we need to see more sports groups and sports organisations in Pride events”

### 3. One to one conversations with former youth athletes

In addition to the roundtables and surveys, Pride Sports reached out to former LGBTQ+ youth athletes no longer involved in competitive sports environments. The following are summaries of conversations with those athletes.





## Michael (He/Him)

### Why did you stop competing?

Michael came out at the age of 16, although not initially in his sports environment. At 19 years old, his university/academic journey was very important. The sports community felt intense and left little room for the rest of his life so he decided to step away. He felt he did not want to be a commodity as a “gay” athlete and wanted to be viewed as a good athlete in the sports community. Growing up in an era of social media, he was visible to many, was self assured felt that staying in the sport and being more vocal on social issues would challenge his ability to succeed or find commercial support as an athlete. He did feel confident to be in the sport and be LGBTQ+ but felt that as his profile grew, the subsequent impacts would not be something he would not wish to deal with.

### What is your advice for people in sport, coming into sport?

Get supportive and engaging messages to kids early as society being open has created as many barriers as it has broken down for many young people (early teens) in sport, where old style norms still exist in too many areas – coaches for example.

### Would your LGBTQ+ friends do sport?

Yes, but they would want to join in with friends socially rather than “strangers” or spaces that might be uncomfortable (even as an adult). People I know would not choose to put themselves back into any scenario that might not be safe or not be social due to past negative experiences.

### How were your coaches?

I never told them, never had that conversation. Not out of fear of rejection but didn't want my sexuality to impact the working relationship or act as a distraction.

## Ann (She/Her)

Ann is a former athlete who is no longer in sport. She was poorly supported by her coach and the sport experience turned sour and stepped away from it at around 18. Ann found the LGBTQ+ world and work. She felt that sport did not fit. She says she would consider social LGBTQ+ opportunities as long as they were safe and inclusive

## Annabel (She/Her)

Annabel says her journey has been enjoyable whilst, reflecting on it at an older age (21) she can see the challenges that may have been there earlier. She thinks that the current teenage generation can see normalised LGBTQ+ role models in 2023 and that is something to celebrate.

When she was in her early teens, she feels, it definitely would have been difficult to be open or out. She feels the option did not exist. She never felt out of place in sport and thinks that this might be easier being female than male. She reflects that she may have come out earlier if football had been a long term sport for her, whereas athletics was fine but no ‘obvious’ or visible LGBTQ+ community (prior to the establishment of Athletics Pride Network) meant the conversation seemed harder to initiate. She believes the team banter in girls football is more supportive of LGBTQ+ girls. Having “stayed straight” she did not really have a community of gay friends and hasn't engaged in “queer” sport. She had no need for that option but, on reflection, can now see that the idea of joining an LGBTQ+ sport could be a great social experience. Annabel is keen to see a more supportive approach by NGBs to the trans community to recognise their needs. She also thinks role models are positive, but no one can be forced to do that. Role models don't have to be superstars. Being authentic and being real to those wanting to come out can be a really big strength.

## Max (He/Him)

Max competed in the girls javelin at national level, left the sport between 16 and 18 and he is on his transition journey 5 to 6 years later. He has found his journey isolating and the lack of clear messaging from sports around trans inclusion has deterred his re-entering the sports arena. He says that the life journey for trans people is far more challenging, so use of activity would need to be easy, safe and sociable. First contact with groups or opportunities he has made so far have all seemed too challenging, with too many questions being asked.



## 4. National Governing Bodies of Sport and LGBTQ+ inclusion in the West Midlands

During October 2023, Pride Sports contacted all Sport England funded National Governing Bodies of Sport, to learn more about any work they were undertaking in the West Midlands targeting LGBTQ+ people, and to identify any local examples of good practice. Six NGBs in total provided responses, but these mainly focused on good practice nationally and very little work was happening with LGBTQ+ communities in the West Midlands.

Subsequently, following presentation of this report's interim findings to Sport Birmingham's NGB Forum/Legacy Transition Day, Pride Sports has been able to engage with a number of NGB reps, both local to the West Midlands region and also nationally.

These engagements allow Pride Sports to develop an understanding of their work with LGBTQ+ populations and how this might then build new practice or enhance existing practice in the West Midlands that could be replicated nationally.

**British Judo** - have a similar model to Athletics with ongoing work to build an ED&I education programme for their clubs and people. Pride Sports has discussed follow-up with other NGBs and a working group that could create a sustainable generic model for ED&I training. This work would also lead to Judo's involvement in social activity sessions as one of the recommendations of this work.

**Pride in Tennis (PiT)** are directly affiliated to the LTA who made the introduction. They want to build in two areas of work. Firstly they would like to support education and training for people and places. They also have a PiT West Midlands Club/Group as a priority based on their own research from 2022. This work would incorporate their work within the Midland Sport Pride Network and offer a new group to the community.

**Pride in Water** - Swimming was one of the two major sports at Birmingham 2022 that benefitted from facility development. Pride in Water is integrated with the

NGB (British Swimming) and is keen to explore a similar working model as Athletics and Judo - that would include mainstream education and sessions for the community. Meanwhile TAGs London want to initiate a trans swimming group within the region. Support from the NGB could potentially help the group to find suitable pooltime.

**England Athletics (EA)** have a locally based "Run Together" programme and Pride Sports has begun discussions around how their sponsor (English Heritage) can offer places for social walking and running activity. EA will offer staff support to develop new groups, working with LGBTQ+ communities. EA is also keen to develop the coach and club education module, and partnership with other NGBs is being discussed to achieve a cost effective and sustainable programme.

**Baseball Softball UK** Pride Sports will be meeting with BSUK in the coming weeks.



## 5. Recommendations

There are key themes that emerge throughout the consultation undertaken as part of this project. LGBTQ+ people want a place where they can take part in sport and physical activity and not be judged, where they will be welcomed; a place that meets them at their starting point.

Based on the roundtables, athlete conversations, survey and discussions with key stakeholders in the West Midlands, Pride Sports makes the following recommendations:

### Workforce Development

The phrase 'non-judgemental' appeared frequently through the survey and the roundtables, as well as the terms 'welcoming' and 'friendly'. In this respect, workforce is central to the delivery of an LGBTQ+ sport and physical activity offer in the West Midlands. As the previously referenced 'Pride in Our Workforce' research highlights, 'a workforce perceived to be approachable and inclusive is a critical part of engaging with LGBTQ+ communities'. Workforce development needs to incorporate consideration of LGBTQ+ inclusion across the

entire sports ecosystem - from gyms, leisure centres, sports clubs, event delivery; any place LGBTQ+ people engage with sport and physical activity, to ensure confidence in engaging LGBTQ+ participants and customers.

### Tools for Change

Both accreditation schemes and toolkits are recommended by participants, and we would recommend that if either is implemented, that they are living initiatives, which enable sport and physical activity provision to continuously update.

A region-wide cost-effective accreditation scheme, including a self-assessment tool could be developed to encourage clubs and facilities to engage with practical steps to make their offer more inclusive.

### Communication

The role of communication is also reflected upon by participants and respondents, both in terms of the sport and physical activity sector's capacity to reach LGBTQ+ populations, and the way it promotes visible role models, not just from performance sport, but also community sport. Pride Sports recommends that WMCA works with Sports Media LGBT+ who have developed some expertise in this area, for example their Rainbow Ready media resource and 'Communicating

LGBT+ Inclusion' online webinar. Sports Media LGBT+ also produced LGBT+ media guidance for Birmingham 2022<sup>11</sup>.

### Schools and FE

School sport and PE isn't meeting the needs of many LGBTQ+ children and young people and early experiences can have a negative impact on participation later in life. LGBTQ+ interventions in schools often don't take account of the unique environment created in high school PE. It is recommended that WMCA makes use of existing education networks in the region (schools and colleges networks) to identify any best practice, which can be shared. In the absence of existing best practice in the region, WMCA could identify other examples from around the UK.

### LGBTQ+ Community Sport

LGBTQ+ community sports provision is clearly highly regarded by those who currently participate in it as well as those who don't. The development of the Midland Sport Pride Network (MSPN), an umbrella organisation for LGBTQ+ community sport in the region, can be the catalyst for progress and community action.

In relation to the findings of this report, MSPN recognises two paths that would run in parallel but which require specific, tailored delivery models in order to achieve best success.

**Sport with Pride** should encompass the work of the LGBTQ+ clubs and groups that offer sport to LGBTQ+ communities and allies, across the West Midlands. This work will focus on the following areas:

- Partnership with NGBs (as referenced in section 5) to educate and enhance the inclusivity of sports clubs & facilities across the West Midlands
- Utilise the experiences and expertise of club members to empower others to enjoy sport and to challenge the barriers that exist in mainstream sport, that prevent inclusive and safe opportunities to train, compete, coach and work.
- Grow capacity and create new opportunities where need is identified (e.g. a new Pride in Tennis group for the region, as outlined in section 5)



**Queer Active** would commit to ensuring that everyone is able to access a series of high quality opportunities to engage in physical activity and be treated with respect:

- Champion equality and good practice to ensure that physical activity sessions are delivered in an appropriate environment to enable all to participate irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Promote inclusive and safe opportunities using community networks and venues to focus on the inactive and more “social” options.

Queer Active and Sport with Pride would develop strong partnerships with other regional organisations to achieve these ambitions.

These two strands will be wrapped together by the **Midland Sport Pride** Network to create sustainable infrastructure and future proof the work of both. The fully constituted body would be able to source future funding and partners to ensure a real and sustainable series of outcomes for the work.

## Trans & Non-Binary Facilities Guidance

With the recent shift of many NGBs towards trans-exclusive policies for competition, there may be significant opportunities for the physical activity and gym/leisure sectors to provide a place where trans and non-binary people feel that they belong. Trans and non-binary inclusion guidance for facilities can be an essential tool in bringing this ambition to life

## Inactivity

With so many respondents seeking a differentiated offer from sports providers or a ‘beginners’ offer, sport and physical activity stakeholders in the West Midlands should consider ways in which existing offers targeting inactive populations can both reach out to LGBTQ+ populations and make them feel welcomed and included.

## Kit

WMCA could also begin conversations with Tess Howard at Inclusive Sportswear to make recommendations to sport and physical activity providers about championing kit that is inclusive for all, including LGBTQ+ people. Ultimately, this could be cascaded across the regional sports infrastructure to include schools and youth sport, alongside sports clubs<sup>12</sup>.

## Mental Health & Sport

Mental health and wellbeing is a significant factor/motivator for this population, and it is recommended that WMCA and sports providers with a mental health focus consider the intersection between mental wellbeing and LGBTQ+ people and experiences, to examine whether existing provision can meet the needs of this population as part of the West Midlands Mental Health Commission’s report recommendations. This requires further research resulting in an expanded workforce offer integrating mental health and wellbeing within club and organisations safeguarding policies and training.

## Leadership

Consideration should be given to how the LGBTQ+ voice in sport and physical activity decision making is strengthened. This needs to happen at a local community level, at regional level and thought given to how this could influence national good practice. Tools could include educating local sport boards to be more inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community.





# Appendix One

The project has allowed us to open new doors to partners and agencies that would be able to endorse and enhance our outcomes and recommendations

## 1. Partners

- a. BAYC OUT Group
  - i. A youth group for young LGBTQ+ people – used this group for an additional round table exercise and offered up some very specific insight that confirms and adds to the wider data collection
- b. OpenMinds
  - i. An Asian social group for LGBTQ+ people, first discussion suggested that an activity group for these people would add great value to their experience
  - ii. Follow up meeting planned to link to the Activity pathway (walking, cycling, etc)
- c. United by 2022
  - i. Met to discuss how our outcomes could be underpinned or enhanced by U2022 programmes. Explored the option of support for the education programme with a youth/volunteer focus that would bring NGB Pride Groups to create an “ambassador” workforce together to deliver workshops to mainstream clubs, coaches, officials, athletes and others
- d. Sport Birmingham / Sport Partnerships
  - i. Network to ensure communication to schools, clubs and other partners for the report outcomes
  - ii. Meeting SB Inclusion Manager in next 2 weeks
- e. BCC Sport and Physical Activity
  - i. Venue provision discussions that could be modelled across the region

## 4. Local Authorities

- a. Solihull
  - i. Met and updated the Active Wellbeing team about the project. They are keen to explore opportunities to train staff but also offer safe and inclusive spaces for activity. Further meetings to be agreed
- b. Coventry
  - i. Developed contact with LGBTQ+ staff network to support future comms and promotion
    - Outcome - local authority pilot for staff training

## 5. Universities

- a. Birmingham
  - i. Established comms network with both staff and student allies network
  - ii. Working with UB Sport to build an education programme for club coaches and team sport players/athletes
- b. Warwick
  - i. Established contact with LGBTQ+ & Allies groups within staff and student bodies.
  - ii. Identified support for report outcomes

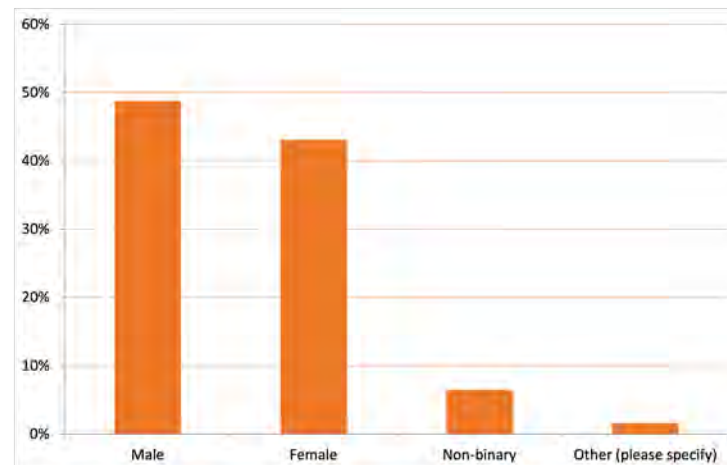
## 6. Pride Groups

- a. Birmingham
  - i. Initiated contact and they are supportive of working with MPN to offer safe space/venues for clubs and groups.
  - ii. AP met with Lawrence Barton with regards to the programme/research
  - iii. Very happy to support an end of research / launch of outcomes event at city centre venue
  - iv. Have now been in touch with Birmingham Pride ED&I team to enable wider community comms for the future
- b. Wolverhampton
  - i. Similar to 6a.
- c. Warwick
  - i. First contact made
- d. Coventry (ongoing attempts being made)

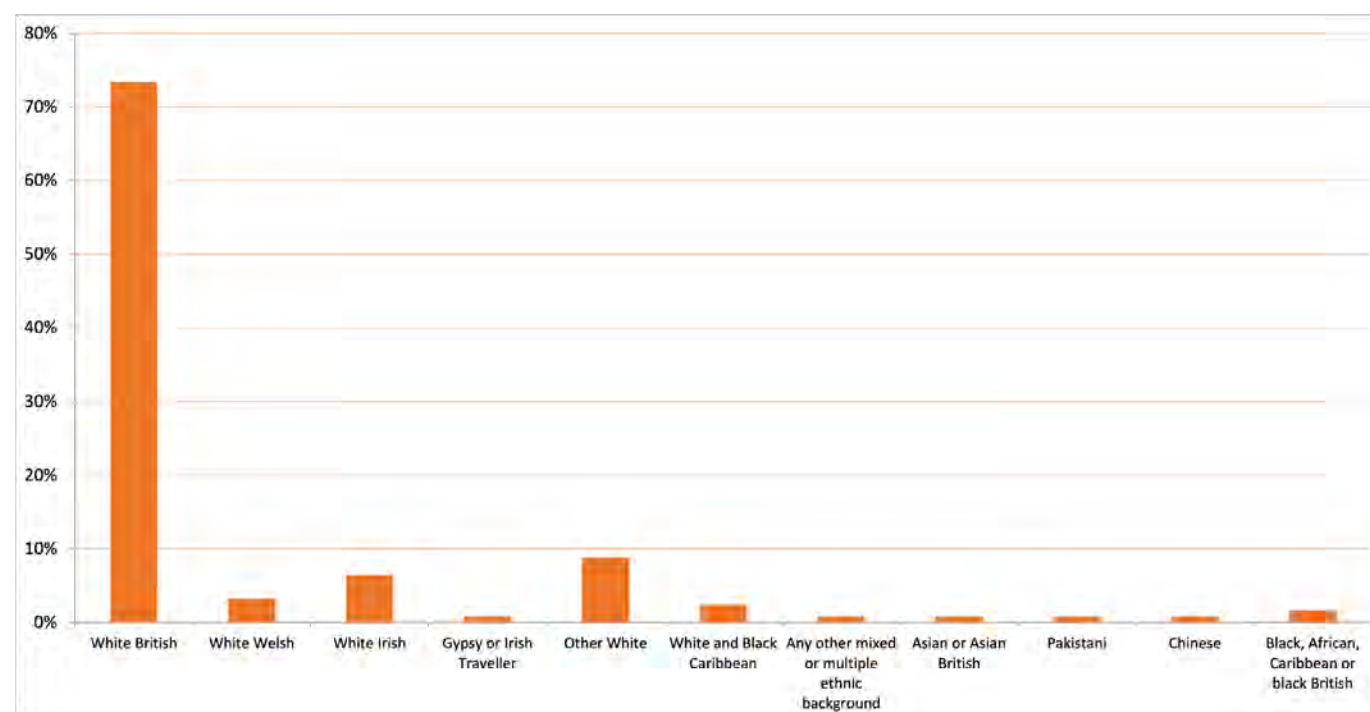
## Appendix Two

Demographic data from survey:

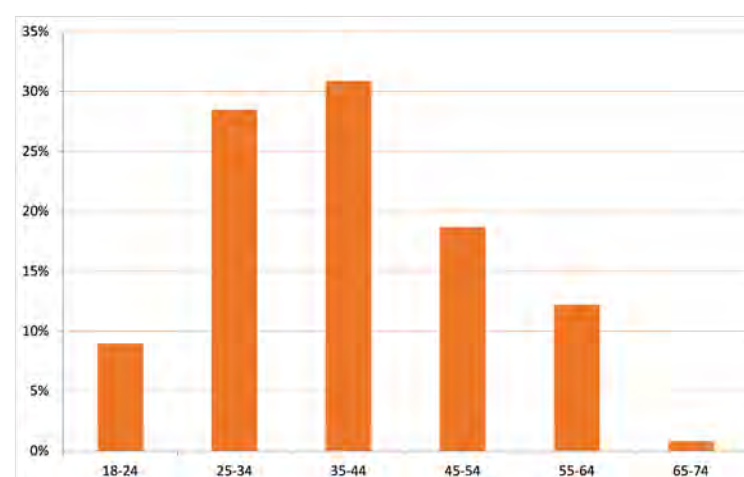
### Gender



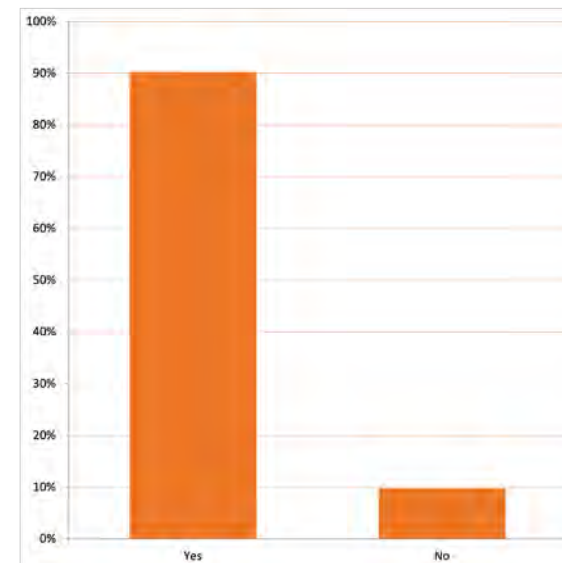
### Ethnic origin



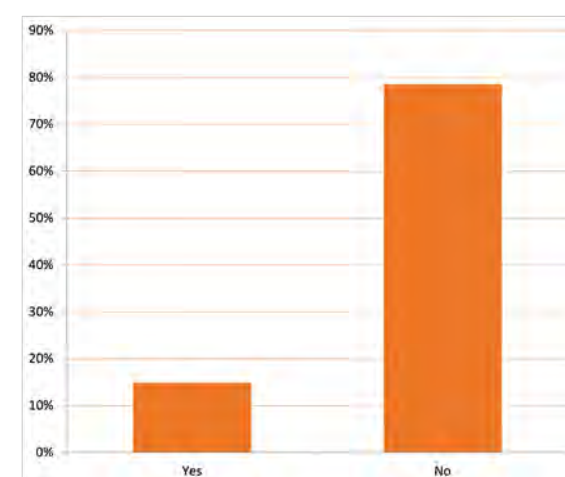
### Age



Is your gender the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?



Do you have a disability?



## Glossary of Terms

Taken from LGBTQ+ Charity Stonewall's List of LGBTQ+ Terms<sup>13</sup>

### Cisgender or Cis

Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-trans is also used by some people.

### Gay

Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality - some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

### Gender expression

How a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans.

### Gender identity

A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

### Heterosexual/straight

Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women or to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men.

### Homosexual

This might be considered a more medical term used to describe someone who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The term 'gay' is now more generally used.

### Homophobia

The fear or dislike of someone, based on prejudice or negative attitudes, beliefs or views about lesbian, gay or bi people. Homophobia may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, lesbian, gay or bi.

### Intersex

A term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Intersex people may identify as male, female or non-binary.

### Lesbian

Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

### LGBTQ+

The acronym for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace.

### Non-binary

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

### Queer

Queer is a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 80s by the queer community who have embraced it.

### Sexual orientation

A person's sexual attraction to other people, or lack thereof. Along with romantic orientation, this forms a person's orientation identity.

### Trans

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

### Transgender man

A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

### Transgender woman

A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

### Transitioning

The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this.

Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently, and changing official documents.

### Transphobia

The fear or dislike of someone based on the fact they are trans, including denying their gender identity or refusing to accept it. Transphobia may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, trans.

### Endnotes

- 1 <https://d3nkl3psvxxpe9.cloudfront.net/documents/YG-Archive-SexualityScaleInternal-240519.pdf>
- 2 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/2021-census-what-do-we-know-about-the-lgbt-population/>
- 3 [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_health.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_health.pdf)
- 4 [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_-\\_trans\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_-_trans_report_final.pdf)
- 5 <https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Young-People-Sport-FINAL.pdf>
- 6 <https://pridesports.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Non-binary.pdf>
- 7 [https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/research/lgbtq?section=getting\\_lgbtq\\_people\\_active](https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/research/lgbtq?section=getting_lgbtq_people_active)
- 8 <https://nationallgbtpartnership.org.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/lgbt-people-and-physical-activity-what-you-need-to-know.pdf>
- 9 <https://pridesports.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/review-of-lgbt-sport-and-physical-activity-infrastructure.pdf>
- 10 <https://www.energise.me.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Pride-in-Our-Workforce.pdf>
- 11 [sportsmedialgbt.com](https://sportsmedialgbt.com)
- 12 <https://inclusivesportswear.com>
- 13 <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/list-lgbtq-terms>





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