# *GUIDELINES*

## for an LGBTQ-Inclusive Education

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# IGLYO

In partnership with

**OBESSU** Organising Bureau of
European School Student Unions

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*Guidelines*

# PREAMBLE

The facts are here: in Europe, school is where young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer people face the most discrimination. When IGLYO, in partnership with ILGA-Europe, conducted a European study in 2006[1], as many as 61% of the young LGBT respondents reported negative personal experiences in schools: social exclusion, bullying, harassment, verbal and physical aggressions, and curriculum-based discrimination on the basis of their perceived gender identity and/or sexual orientation. This was a greater percentage than discrimination experienced in their family, circle of friends or community.

IGLYO's vision is a world where we, young people in all our diversity, are able to express and define our own sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions, and are able to participate fully in all aspects of life, achieve to our full potential, and enjoy respect and positive recognition. This will never be possible without an open, human rights-friendly, less heteronormative education at all levels.

The task at hand is hugely challenging. Parents must be convinced that we're not trying to 'convert' anyone to anything. Teachers and lecturers need to be aware that this is the right thing to do, and they must be protected by national laws when talking about discrimination. Local communities, teacher and student unions, non-teaching staff, local authorities and governments must see that we're not asking for special, favourable treatment, but for human rights for all.

The present Guidelines are not the ultimate guide to LGBTQ-friendly schools and universities[2]. They aim to be an extensive response to the question "Where do we start in our schools and universities?". They give directions and ideas based on young activists' experience of what works, and what doesn't. They are unique, and stem from the experience of a wide network of experienced international youth activists.

We hope to give fruitful ideas, endless motivation and useful recommendations to many more activists, young or less young, to change their schools and universities for the better.

Towards education for all!

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*IGLYO Board members*

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[1] *Social exclusion of young lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Europe*. ILGA-Europe and IGLYO, 2006. See *Resources*.
[2] Because the guidelines are the result of common work with the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions, we often refer to 'schools' and 'pupils'. However, all of these guidelines are equally applicable to universities and students. See *Resources* for organisations focusing on universities.

# CONTENTS

# 1 | HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

**Human Rights education is crucial** to raise awareness about Human Rights, issues linked to discrimination, and the education of young people to universal rights for all. In some national curricula, citizenship or civic education includes Human Rights.

All articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are relevant to LGBTQ people, just as they are to all people. However, many of the Human Rights outlined in the Declaration are routinely denied to LGBTQ people, by both governments and governmental institutions such as schools.

In using the context of Human Rights, we **recognise that all people deserve the same rights**, even if they are different from each other. This is helpful when discussing not only rights for LGBTQ people, but rights for people of different ethnicities, abilities, genders and so on.

Human Rights should be integrated both in the **educational approach** (teaching methods, school ethos) and in the **educational content** (teaching about Human Rights).

> By integrating Human Rights education through both what is taught and how it is taught, schools can create a culture of respect for and appreciation of diversity.
>
> - Be explicit about how the Human Rights framework interacts with subjects like women's emancipation, slavery, or genocide.
>
> - Focus on Human Rights as a central part of citizenship education.
>
> - School student unions have a role to play in making sure that your school's ethos respects the Human Rights of all who are associated with it. It might have an equality policy for pupils and teachers, but what about non-teaching staff like cleaners or accountants? Are their Human Rights being upheld?

Human Rights training should be provided within **teacher training**, as well as professional training for other members of the school community.

Human Rights training should always cover LGBTQ issues. LGBTQ organisations are usually happy to help as experts during trainings.

# 2 | SEXUALITY AND EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

Mandatory sexuality education lessons should **also explore the emotional side of sex**. They should also discuss relationships, rather than only reproductive functions.

> These explorations and discussions should remain gender neutral. This way, it applies to all forms of relationships, rather than just heterosexual ones.

This avoids educating only about heterosexual and procreative sex, which can seem irrelevant to many students who are discovering their own sexuality, with all the anxieties, needs and desires that come with it. When talking about sexuality in schools, we should:

- **Focus on feelings** and the emotions associated with relationships. This could be done by looking at 'case studies' of other young people to start the discussion if students are reluctant to start to talk about their own feelings.

- Discuss sex and being safe **in broader terms than procreative sex**. 'Sex' should never mean just the kind of sex that could result in a pregnancy: that encourages the idea that other kinds of sex are unusual and therefore strange or unnatural.

- Talk about the feelings, worries and desires that 'people' have, rather than how 'girls' and 'boys' feel. This avoids perpetuating gendered stereotypes, and enables all school students to feel comfortable with their emotions and feelings. All people experience all emotions.

- Make a special effort to talk about same-sex relationships openly with all students. This is another opportunity to deliver Human Rights education.

This education should strive as far as possible to be **independent and based on facts** rather than biased beliefs.

Specific information should be included about LGBTQ relationships, sexuality and safer sex, which could be taught to all students, not just LGBTQ students (and vice-versa for heterosexual relationships).

Talking about LGBTQ sexuality **helps to dispel some myths**, such as 'all gay men have anal sex', 'lesbian sex is really just foreplay', or 'all transsexuals must have an operation'. It's also a chance to highlight that LGBTQ people have relationships with emotions and feelings just like everyone else.

Speak out against heteronormativity: **not all people are heterosexual**, and there should be discussion, or at least recognition, of sexual diversity.

Consider asking the teacher to leave the classroom for a class of sexual and emotional education. People will talk more freely, and ask the real questions.

# 3 | CURRICULUM AND LEARNING MATERIALS

The curriculum should include LGBTQ perspectives and contain LGBTQ-inclusive materials, both as part of generic materials, and if possible as standalone materials which specifically deal with LGBTQ issues.

If some members of the school community complain that it seems as though too many resources are going towards publicising information on LGBTQ themes, remind them that all the rest of textbooks and other teaching materials are heterosexu-

ality-themed. They just don't notice that because it is considered 'normal'.

So, it's important to **make room for information about LGBTQ people** too, and pay special attention to LGBTQ issues in some instances, such as if an author or historic character is LGBTQ.

Inclusive materials and textbooks should use LGBTQ examples, both within questions and as sources.

When a sexual orientation is mentioned implicitly or explicitly, all sexual orientations should also be mentioned.

Heterosexual couples and families are frequently used as the setting for mathematical problems, so LGBTQ couples/relationships should feature there too.

When discussing families, avoid using gendered terms like 'mother' and 'father'. **Using terms like 'parents', 'guardians' or 'carers'** includes everyone and does not implicitly favour heteroparental families.

Many literary texts benefit from being read through an 'LGBTQ lens'. Often other meanings can come to light through rejecting the assumption that all literary characters are heterosexual.

Teaching methods should be varied, **mixing formal and non-formal education**. This teaching could also be provided by youth or other non-governmental organisations, or by teachers.

The school curriculum, lesson plans and materials should be developed together by both teachers and students, and revised regularly. This will make for a more relevant and interesting curriculum for all.

Students, teachers or non-teaching staff's complaints about the curriculum, lesson plans or materials should be easily communicate at the relevant school, local, regional or national levels.

## 4 | ANTI-BULLYING AND OTHER INCLUSIVE POLICIES

**Every school should have an anti-bullying policy** addressing all kinds of discrimination, and explicitly including homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Anti-bullying policies and other inclusive policies should be regarded as 'living documents', which are continuously updated.

This policy should **cover every member of the school community**, and be respected by all.

The policy should be reviewed regularly by members of the school community in order to assess its effectiveness.

Anti-bullying education should be included in the hidden agenda from the very first stages of schooling.

> There are many ways to include anti-bullying education in the curriculum…
>
> - **Reading stories to students** which include an element of discrimination based on difference. Use this as a discussion point to talk about how some people are attacked because their characteristics are not considered 'normal'. Talk about why people are attacked: could it be because others feel threatened by their difference? This can form the beginning of a discussion about bullying.
>
> - In Art classes, students can address anti-bullying themes by creating anti-bullying and pro-diversity images, which can be exhibited.
>
> - Some countries nominate a special day or week in the calendar as '**anti-bullying week**'. If yours does, think about events or actions that students and schools could prepare to mark this occasion. If it doesn't, start it in your school!

All teachers should receive training to recognise and act upon homophobic and transphobic bullying. This training should inform them of how to react to such bullying, and how to reduce its occurrence. This training could be externally facilitated (e.g. by a specialised charity).

> All too often, we hear stories of students telling teachers that they are being bullied because they are LGBTQ, and the teacher's reaction is that homophobic bullying is not 'real' bullying, or that it is the student's fault that they are being bullied. Make sure that this doesn't happen to students at your school by ensuring that all teachers receive training on the importance of combating homophobic bullying.

All incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying should be **recorded in a log book** and reported in order to preserve evidence and measure improvement.

The anti-bullying policy should include a clear plan of action to be followed whenever an incident is reported.

> This plan of action should **prioritise making the victim safe**, and should make clear that there are very serious repercussions for a bully who does not stop bullying when warned.

A mediation system where **school students have the responsibility to act as mediators** between adults and young people should be set up. This is to facilitate the reporting of bullying incidents, as well as the process of resolution. This student mediator is also much more likely to be trusted by peers.

Cooperation between the school, students and their parents is necessary to establish the school's responsibility to ensure the safety of all students at the school, the students' responsibility not to bully, and the parents' responsibility to report their children being bullied.

Schools should make every effort to combat the idea that bullying is 'cool' (for instance, organise informal events for students, run by ex-bullies or victims of bullying).

# 5 | ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

There are several areas where it is important that students can access both information and support on LGBTQ issues. These are:

- Counselling,

- Community support (such as LGBTQ youth groups),

- Internet & printed materials, and

- Other forms of friendly media such as newspapers.

Schools should **include LGBTQ materials in their library**. These might be LGBTQ-inclusive books, or books which deal specifically with LGBTQ issues.

> The books should be available, and not hidden on high-up shelves or adult sections. They should also be available to take home, as some pupils could want to read them in private.

LGBTQ materials such as **posters and leaflets** advertising LGBTQ youth groups and services should be displayed on school noticeboards.

Individual and/or group support, such as a trained counsellor or **a voluntary 'trust person'** should be available for individuals or groups to talk to in confidence during and outside of school hours (for instance by e-mail or through sites like Facebook or Myspace).

A voluntary 'trust person' is someone freely approachable by any member of the school community, who will **take people seriously and treat their problems with confidentially**. This person and their contact details or office hours should be advertised widely.

Both the 'trust person' and any counsellors should undergo training on LGBTQ issues. They should explicitly and publicly make known that they are LGBTQ friendly.

Any events or campaigns run within the school should acknowledge, include and respect all students, especially those who are discriminated against.

Schools should provide support for **support groups** between LGBTQ teachers, LGBTQ parents, LGBTQ students and parents of LGBTQ young people.

Student councils should be supported to set up **LGBTQ clubs and societies** for students.

Every school should regularly remind the whole community about inclusive policies in a variety of ways. These could include on posters, on fliers, on banners, through media on internal websites, through school magazines or journals, on stickers, etc. Students should be involved in the creation of all these resources.

Members of the school community should have the opportunity to attend **informative events** about the school's inclusive policies.

Internet-based information educating about LGBTQ issues must be accessible (and not blocked by safety filters).

> There is a difference between pornography and sexuality. Pornography is material created for sexual purposes, but sexuality is part of our identities—everybody has one, even straight people! Schools should not ban exploring sexuality in a constructive and educational way (e.g. blocking access to websites supporting LGBTQ young people). For a lot of pupils, **school could be the only safe place where they can get more information**!
>
> - If websites like youth forum boards or information on sexualities are blocked, ask teachers, librarians or the technical team to unblock them, and explain why. It is pupils' right to access educational information in a safe environment.
>
> - Make the difference between pornography and sexuality clear: while pornography should not be allowed in schools, sexuality is part of our nature, and schools should make sure pupils can explore it safely.

The school or its information centre should keep a database of useful websites dealing with issues of discrimination and prejudice. These websites can be used by teachers when planning their lessons in order to generate ideas for ways to teach more LGBTQ inclusively.

# 6 | EXTERNAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

External support might include individuals such as trained counsellors, or groups such as non-governmental organisations with the relevant expertise.

Schools should actively **create or maintain alliances** with parents of LGBTQ students, LGBTQ parents, LGBTQ-friendly politicians, LGBTQ charities, LGBTQ-friendly mental health institutions and others.

The school should use these alliances and external support to **empower and support student councils** to address LGBTQ issues and other minority or discrimination issues.

> If your school student council feels that school staff are not adequately trained on integrating LGBTQ issues at the school, you could **approach an LGBTQ organisation to offer training** to the teachers and other staff members.

All school students should be empowered to stand up for their own rights and safety. This could include a school running self-defence classes. Schools should use the appropriate external support for this training.

Students or student councils should be involved in the process of choosing and evaluating such external support, as well as in the preparation process of their interventions.

After the training has occurred, teachers should also facilitate a debriefing session and arrange follow-up, in partnership with the school students union and the experts who came in.

Schools should support and recognise research analysing the situation of LGBTQ school students. This can be facilitated by relevant LGBTQ charities.

Schools should run **LGBTQ awareness events** to facilitate discussion and improve all students' understanding of LGBTQ issues. This could include workshops from external organisations and talks from external speakers.

> LGBTQ awareness events could be **debates, discussions, or celebration** events. They could be scheduled to coincide with a local or national Pride festival, or could occur in reaction to coverage of LGBTQ issues in the media.
>
> But if there has not been an LGBTQ awareness event at your school for a long time, don't wait for a convenient moment to organise one. Go ahead and make sure that awareness is raised. It's a good idea to invite experts from LGBTQ charities to facilitate awareness events. Some ideas to get discussion started:
>
> - Mark one wall of the room as 'Completely agree', and the other wall as 'Completely disagree'. Ask students to position themselves between the walls depending on how they feel about LGBTQ themed statements such as: 'Same-sex couples make good parents', 'Everyone's gender is fixed from the moment of conception', or 'Children can be gay'. Start a constructive debate between the two sides.
>
> - **Invite an LGBTQ person or a same-sex couple** known to you or to other students to talk about their lives and answer students' questions. Experts from an LGBTQ organisation could also answer technical questions about LGBTQ rights.
>
> - **Show a short film** with an LGBTQ theme and have a representative from an LGBTQ charity facilitate a non-formal debriefing afterwards.

Schools should reserve hours in the school week in which **external support can be hosted in schools**, and talk about issues which affect school students in society, including LGBTQ issues.

# 7 | NETWORKING

It is essential that schools **cooperate with LGBTQ organisations, school student unions**, Human Rights education experts, parents, and other allies.

> Schools don't have the answer to everything! Sometimes, inviting external experts to speak to the school community (to the pupils, the staff, or both) brings a fresh perspective and they can help to solve problems, or offer support in creative ways.
>
> - Get in touch with a local student union or LGBT organisation, who will have contacts of other organisations suitable for a school intervention.

- Suggest to your teachers or head teacher that this will allow students to hear a certain message that they won't have to deliver. Students might be more open to what 'neutral' people from outside the school have to say.

Schools should **encourage, support and empower school students unions to start LGBTQ-friendly groups** facilitating sharing experiences of LGBTQ young people. This will help LGBTQ young people to work together and motivate each other to improve their situation, and where these networks are international, can help school students in countries which are more LGBTQ-inclusive to help those in countries which are not.

# 8 | SAFE ENVIRONMENT

**Schools should be treated as safe spaces**. These are safe learning environments in which intimidation or discrimination of any sort, including homophobia or transphobia are not tolerated, with penalties for those who do not respect this. Parents and all members of the school community should be informed that this is the school's ethos.

Such schools could **label themselves 'LGBTQ-friendly'** for public acknowledgment.

Consider a 'Human Rights-friendly' label instead, if the school is scared of openly declaring its LGBTQ-friendliness.

Schools should be visibly LGBTQ-friendly. This should be evident in the publicity and materials produced by the school.

Hateful graffiti or other expressions of hatred should be immediately removed if they appear.

Hateful graffiti on a school wall offers a good opportunity to discuss homophobia and LGBTQ rights with the pupils. However, if it is not removed soon enough, the implicit message will become 'this is part of our school', 'this is tolerated'. It is highly hurtful to LGBTQ young people to see publicly displayed hatred. Like anti-Semitic or racist messages, it must not be tolerated by the school community.

Take the opportunity to raise the question with the head teacher, or during school assembly. It's a good occasion to discuss LGBTQ rights, and question common assumptions, like 'homosexuality is a disease', or 'transvestites all become prostitutes'.

Schools should set up instances where students can talk openly about themselves without fear of being judged by others. One way of doing this could be to run support groups at which a trained 'trust person', ombudsperson, mediator or counsellor is present to allow students to express themselves.

Schools should ensure that **students' and teachers' right to privacy** is enforced. This means allowing students or teachers to keep their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression private unless they choose otherwise.

# 9 | MAINSTREAMING

Mainstreaming means **making the existence of LGBTQ people in society a usual thing**. Within a school, this should be done by ensuring that LGBTQ people are included and represented (also see *3. Curriculum and Learning Materials*).

LGBTQ students should be visible in campaigns run by the school student union, especially any campaign which deals with issues of diversity.

Schools should make use of statistics and publications about LGBTQ-related issues, which can be accessed through public media, on the internet, or via specialised organisations. This will help to inform about the importance of LGBTQ inclusion, and the problems that occur when LGBTQ people are discriminated against.

Members of the school student union should be made aware of their responsibility to multiply and spread their LGBTQ-friendly values to other areas of their lives, such as youth groups and other areas where they have influence.

Every school should **make their policies visible** and well-publicised at all times, but **especially when they are open** to parents or members of the public (e.g. open days or parent evenings).

> This encourages the entire school community to adhere to and discuss the values of the school. **Encourage participation**: if a group of pupils are unhappy about a certain aspect of their school policy, discuss it in assembly. If they are willing to invest their own time in it, offer to listen to the offers they make after having thought about the issues in a reflection group (this can be a great extra-curricular involvement in the school, or take up an hour of Citizenship classes).
>
> - Involvement will bring a feeling of commitment and caring about one's school.
>
> - Caring about one's school will lead to engaging more with it — inside and outside of the class.
>
> - More engagement will, in the end, mean a more enjoyable school experience for all involved — as well as better results, in most cases!

The school should **avoid heterosexist language** as much as possible. Some ways of avoiding using heterosexist language are:

- Using neutral pronouns when referring to someone, unless one is certain that that person identifies as a man or a woman. Ask the person in question otherwise. Refer to students as 'people' or 'students' rather than as 'boys and girls'.

- Keep all language as inclusive as possible. Avoid making gender-normative statements such as 'football is a man's game', 'boys don't cry', or 'sciences aren't for girls'.

- Refer to 'parents' rather than 'mother and father', as this will never be the reality of all students.

This will be beneficial to a large part of the student body: students in homoparental families, but also the estranged, whose parents are divorced, whose parent have died, etc.

- Avoid asking about 'boyfriends' or 'girlfriends', as doing so makes assumptions about the person you're asking. Instead, **use neutral terms such as 'partner'**.

Some languages do not have neutral terms such as 'partner', or it may be referred to in a non-neutral way. Take 2 minutes to think about this: there is always a way to state things neutrally. Why not try phrases such as 'special someone', or 'significant other'?

- In representations of people, use gender neutral names and colours (not gender-related colours such as blue or pink) as far as possible in order for all students to be able to identify with the representation.

- Most importantly, **never assume that all your students or staff members are heterosexual, nor that they could be homosexual**.

# 10 | SCHOOL DEMOCRACY

Schools should **encourage students to take initiatives** and be involved in the development of their policies.

Students should be empowered to be involved in all decision-making, policy matters and activities that concern them.

By involving students in decision-making processes, their interests will be best represented. Somebody else speaking for them will never truly serve the pupils' interests! It's in the best interest of the school, as well as the students and the parents to ensure the pupils' issues are heard and worked on.

Schools should recognise, hear and **respect student unions**, in their school, city, region, and country.

Members of the school community should empower school student unions to lobby educational instances (such as ministries of education) for the mainstreamed inclusion of LGBTQ people and issues.

School may choose to support students to implement their projects or initiatives. This will enable other school student unions to run similar projects with the support of their schools.

**All school students should have the democratic right to play an active role in their school council.** This must include being allowed to meet together with other students, to speak at meetings and to vote. Schools should actively engage with their school students' councils and support their work.

# RESOURCES

This is a list of useful resources when working on LGBTQ inclusion in education. Because they are in English, they sometimes present a western point of view. We are very much aware of the different regional and national contexts, and strongly encourage you to contact your local or national LGBTQ organisations. They will be able to point you to relevant information in your language.

## OFFICIAL WEBSITES

- IGLYO's official website contains links to previous events, reports, local and national member organisations, and current activities. You can also download the present guidelines, and find the 2006 *Social exclusion* report. **www.iglyo.com**

- The website of OBESSU allows you to get in touch with your national school student union, and learn about initiatives by and for school students in Europe. **www.obessu.org**

## HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

- Looking for something to start a discussion on Human Rights, in the classroom or elsewhere? The Human Rights Action Center has a great video online. **www.humanrightsactioncenter.org**

- The Yogyakarta Principles show how each article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights applies to sexual orientation and gender identity. Available in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese. **www.yogyakartaprinciples.org**

- The Council of Europe publishes very useful resources for non-formal education on Human Rights. Look for the lists of activities in the Compass, the Education Pack and DOmino. Available in English, French, Russian and Arabic. **www.eycb.coe.int/compass**

## OTHER ORGANISATIONS

- The Global Alliance for LGBT Education is a growing global network of people working on LGBT issues in education. Available in English, French and Spanish. **www.lgbt-education.info**

- Stonewall, a UK-based charity, campaigns against homophobic bullying through leaflets, a video and a DVD. **www.stonewall.org.uk/education_for_all**

- Also in the UK, Schools Out! makes a great Student Toolkit for inclusion in schools. **www.schools-out.org.uk/STK**

- ANSO, the Association of Nordic LGBTQ Student Organisations, published a leaflet on fighting heteronormativity in higher education. **www.anso.dk**

Everyone has the right to education.
**Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)**

Everyone has the right to education, without
discrimination on the basis of, and taking into
account, their sexual orientation and gender identity.
**Principle 16, Yogyakarta Principles (2007)**