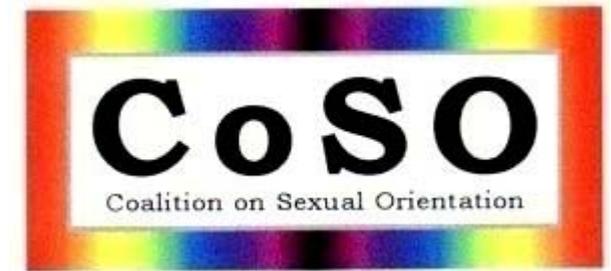


Member Organisations

- Belfast Lesbian Line
- Belfast Butterfly Club
- Belfast Gay Pride Committee
- Belfast Out Resource Centre
- Cara-Friend
- Foyle Friend
- Foyle Friend Youth
- Gay Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland
- Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
- LGB Branch of the NUS / USI
- LGB Branch of Unison Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association
- Press for Change
- QueerSpace
- The Rainbow Project

*Contact Details for all Member Organisations of
CoSO can be found on the CoSO website.*



Equality and Sexual Orientation

*A Guide to Involving and Consulting the Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual and Trans Community*

Coalition on Sexual Orientation

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A united lobbying and campaigning voice for sexual minorities in Northern Ireland

This guide is also available in large-print format, on request from CoSO.

- *A Mighty Silence*, Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative, Belfast, 2002.
- *Breaking Down Barriers, Building a more diverse queer community, a report from the QueerSpace diversity conference as part of Belfast Pride 2002*, QueerSpace, Belfast, 2003.
- McCracken, A & Moore, E; *The craic's good*, The Rainbow Project, Belfast, 1997.
- McCracken, A & White, R; *How hard can it be?*, The Rainbow Project, Belfast, 1998.
- McCracken, A; Toner, F; & McIlrath, K; *Express yourself*, The Rainbow Project, Belfast, 1999.
- “*Irish, Queer and Equal?*” *Conference report, 8th August 2000*, Clar na mBan, PeaceWatch Ireland and Falls Women’s Centre, Belfast, 2001.
- *Enhancing the Rights of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Northern Ireland*, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Belfast, 2001.

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Research and Information

CoSO Documents:

- *Response to the Single Equality Bill.*
- *Response to the Draft Equality Schemes.*
- *Response to Framework Employment Equality Directives, 2003.*
- *Annual Reports, 2001–2002, 2002–2003*
- *Other documents are available on request*

Other Research Papers and Documents:

- *Annual Reports, 1974–2003, Cara-Friend, Belfast.*
- *Mum, Dad, I've got something to tell you, Eastern Health & Social Services Board, Belfast, 2001.*
- *Implementing Equality for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals, Equality Authority, Dublin, 2002.*
- *Partnership rights for same-sex couples, Equality Authority, Dublin.*
- *Guide to the Statutory Duties: A Guide to the Implementation of the Statutory Duties on public authorities arising from section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Belfast.*
- *The experiences of Lesbians, Gay and Bisexual People at School in the North West of Ireland, Derry, Foyle Friend, Derry/ Londonderry/ Doire, 1999.*
- *Jarmann, Neil & Tenant, Alex; Homophobic Violence and Harassment in Northern Ireland, Institute for Conflict Research, Belfast, 2003.*
- *Discrimination against Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Persons: A report submitted by ILGA–Europe to the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, ILGA–Europe, Brussels, 2000.*

The Coalition on Sexual Orientation

The Coalition on Sexual Orientation (CoSO) was established by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans* (LGBT) groups in Northern Ireland in order to provide a voice for the LGBT Community in debates and consultations surrounding the rights of the community.

CoSO is a coalition of organisations that represent and provide services to the LGBT Community and is open to any organisation, whether organised across Northern Ireland or in a particular region of it, as well as to individual members of the LGBT Community. Other LGBT organisations are welcome to join and individuals are welcome to participate in CoSO meetings.

CoSO aspires to represent the LGBT Community on issues around sexual orientation. CoSO acts as an umbrella body with which public authorities may consult in order to fulfil their statutory duty under s.75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (c. 47) to promote equal opportunities irrespective of sexual orientation. We will seek to ensure that the concerns of the entire LGBT Community are adequately articulated and acted upon.

CoSO will extend this representative function into other areas of immediate concern to the LGBT Community. In particular, we will represent the LGBT Community in consultations with the Equality Commission on matters concerning issues of sexual orientation. We will also enter into a dialogue with the Human Rights Commission on issues of human rights for sexual minorities, such as within the proposed Bill of Rights.

CoSO strives to be sensitive to, and reflective of, the diversity within the LGBT Community and to redress any inequality within the LGBT Community. That diversity is reflected in the multiple identities of many LGBT people, in that they may be from an ethnic minority, have a disability, be older or younger etc.

CoSO hopes that the following pamphlet will illuminate the complex and tangible needs of the LGBT community. For us this process of consultation under the Statutory Duty is the first step to developing greater understanding of the lives of LGBT people.

*For a full explanation of the role CoSO may play in the representation of trans people see “Getting it Right”. (see page 9)

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Getting it Right

It is vital when considering whether a policy may have an impact on the LGBT Community that all these issues and areas of concern be considered. Be careful that you do not overlook complex and overlapping ways in which sexual orientation issues cross over between sectors. For example, health care issues may arise under a policy area that does not deal directly with healthcare.

Public authorities may need to consult with particular constituencies within the LGBT Community. Recognition and consideration of the fact that some policies will have a particular impact on certain people within the LGBT Community is complicated by the rich diversity of this group. Therefore, adequate consultation will require contact with the LGBT organisations that deal directly with specific issues or individuals.

CoSO works closely with the trans community in Northern Ireland, and one of its representative organisations, Press for Change. CoSO and Press for Change note that transsexual people will have their needs and demands met under the Statutory Duty under the category of “men and women generally”. CoSO and Press for Change have also noted that on some occasions a transsexual person will require representation through CoSO on an issue around their sexual orientation. Public Authorities should therefore consult with Press for Change with regards to the needs and demands of transsexual people and contact details are given below.

CoSO further notes that the Belfast Butterfly Club is part of the trans community and its needs and demands may be represented through CoSO and our internal consultation processes.

We hope that public authorities will not shy away from the fact that LGBT people have identities that are complex, diverse and interwoven. LGBT people suffer multiple discrimination on the basis of their multiple identities, and this too needs to be taken on board during consultation. We hope that the process of consultation and open communication between LGBT organisations and public authorities will begin the process of a greater understanding of these issues.

Preparing for Consultation

It is important that public authorities are prepared for meeting with the LGBT Community by becoming familiar with their expectations.

When preparing for consultation, please consider the following questions. CoSO drew up the following list of questions with reference to the Equality Commission's Guidelines on the Statutory Duty and with reference to recent debates as to the nature and content of Equality Impact Assessments.

- Can you explain in jargon-free language the policies on which you wish to consult the LGBT Community?
- What existing data, research and information do you have on the LGBT Community?
- What methods do you plan to use to obtain the data, research and information necessary for carrying out an equality impact assessment?
- How will you use qualitative/evaluative research/information to assess the impact of your policies on the LGBT Community?
- If you find that your policies have an adverse impact on the LGBT community, how will you work with the LGBT Community to develop options, and mitigate the adverse impact of these policies?
- What steps will you take to actively promote equality of opportunity and equality of outcome for LGBT people?
- What measures will you take to ensure that your consultation with the LGBT Community is effective?
- How will you meet your commitment to take into account any equality impact assessment and consultation carried out with the LGBT Community in relation to your policies?
- What methods will you use to monitor the impact of these policies once they are in place?
- Where do you plan to publish the results of your equality impact assessments and impact monitoring to ensure that the LGBT Community is kept informed?
- If your assessment leads you to the conclusion that your policies will not have an adverse impact on the LGBT Community but it later becomes apparent that they do, will you be willing to change these policies? How will you determine this?
- How will you keep CoSO informed of progress on issues raised as a result of the consultation?

Setting Priorities

The diversity that exists within the LGBT Community means that there are many issues where considerations of equality apply. Due to the extensive nature of the task of screening and impact assessment, it may be necessary to focus consideration upon the key themes listed. Although the interests of the LGBT Community are constantly developing, CoSO has selected these themes under which we believe it is essential that the LGBT Community is consulted.

CoSO has embarked upon its own process of consultation within the LGBT Community. We have held development days and open meetings and consulted via our website and e-mail list. The following themed areas have emerged as key to the delivery of meaningful equality of opportunity and outcome for the LGBT Community.

We would emphasise that these themed areas will be reviewed and updated as the debate within the LGBT Community continues to raise new and pertinent public policy areas.

The concerns of the LGBT area have been divided into the following five themed areas (in no particular order):

- ✦ “Family” and Partnerships
- ✦ Health and Welfare
- ✦ Employment and the Workplace
- ✦ Youth and Education
- ✦ Access to Services

“Family” and Partnerships

LGBT people face unique problems with regard to familial and sexual relationships. Public Authorities must be aware of the dislocating and disassociating impact of the heterosexual normalised family unit on LGBT people.

The dislocation experienced by members of the LGBT Community often leads them to create new practical “family” arrangements which may not match the traditional, cultural and legal meanings. While not recognised by law, same-sex partnerships are a reality of life. The right of same-sex partnerships to receive the respect and due concern given to heterosexual partnerships must be protected.

Examples of some of the “family” and partnership issues which are important to the LGBT Community are:

- Succession, inheritance and property rights
- Parenting, fostering, adoption and surrogacy
- Visitation rights
- Pensions, Insurance
- Immigration
- Custody issues
- LGBT carers
- Recognition of “families” as “families of choice”
- Access to information on LGBT “families”
- Care for elderly LGBT people

Consultation and Training

One of the aims of CoSO is to serve as a conduit of information between the LGBT Community and the Public Authorities. In order to accomplish this, CoSO is willing to meet face-to-face with public servants and to arrange consultations, both formal and informal, with public authorities. In addition, we are willing to provide workshops and awareness training for any group.

CoSO tailors its services to fit the needs and experiences of the organisation and encourages active participation from attendees.

CoSO notes that public authorities must provide necessary resources for consultation and training under the statutory duty. CoSO is an organisation run by volunteers from the LGBT Community and as such works with limited financial, structural and personnel resources.

CoSO requests that public authorities cover the expenses incurred in the consultation process.

CoSO is obliged to charge for workshops and training around sexual orientation issues. Our fees are available on request, and reduced rates are available to organisations with limited resources.

Access to Services

It is not uncommon for LGBT people to feel marginalized by society, especially when they are not treated with dignity and respect when trying to access public and private sector services. There must be full and unhindered access to services; and the special needs of the LGBT Community must be taken into consideration.

Public Authorities must recognise that the question of access to services is not about solely improving the channels of access. LGBT people face legal obstacles to accessing particular services that heterosexual people take for granted.

- Access to legal services
- Extension of the equality of opportunity protection to the private sector
- Access to leisure centres, cinemas, pubs and so on
- Equal treatment of same-sex partners and heterosexual couples in discounting and so on
- Fair treatment in restaurants, pubs and discos
- Access to facilities, local council support and local council funds
- Monitoring of homophobic harassment by service providers
- Removal of barriers between LGBT Community and services
- Location of services in LGBT neighbourhoods, clubs, and so on
- Financial services, Insurance
- Consideration of the needs of LGBT people in establishing and executing pensions
- Advertisement of services in the LGBT Community press and with LGBT Community organisations
- Establishment of and support for resource centres for LGBT people
- Promotion of wider accessibility for and acceptance of LGBT people on the part of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

Youth and Education

It is no coincidence that the suicide rate amongst LGBT children and young people is the highest in its age category. The experience of the LGBT child or young person is one of alienation and isolation. This experience can be caused by a number of factors, for example, the difficulty in coming to terms with one's sexual orientation, the invisibility of the LGBT Community, the use of negative language when speaking of LGBT people, and the lack of positive LGBT role models in the educational institutions, the workforce, neighbourhoods and the clergy. Examples of issues where changes in policy could affect the lives of LGBT youth include:

- Peer support for children under the age of sixteen
- Strong stance against homophobic bullying
- Support and job security for LGBT educators
- Awareness training for all those working with children and young people, both in terms of education and social welfare, for example Education Welfare Officers and social workers
- Positive sex education including safer sex education, and education and understanding of LGBT relationships
- Confidentiality for LGBT youth and educators
- Education free from discrimination
- Recognition of diversity in education, pupils, parents and teachers
- Right to education for LGBT people who may miss out due to bullying, lack of opportunity, or socio-economic marginalization
- Availability of positive LGBT role models for pupils and teachers
- Sources of advice and support for teachers with regard to dealing with the needs of LGBT children and young people and the particular situations which arise with regard to those needs, for example coming out.
- Removal of exemptions for private and religious schools
- Creation of an atmosphere where children and young people are free to express their opinions
- Information on LGBT youth organisations in schools, libraries, and other places
- Education for older people around the experience of LGBT people

Employment and the Workplace

Some of the major concerns of LGBT people are job security and safety in the workplace. No one wants to work in an environment where they feel marginalized or threatened. Job security is not enough; effort must be made to ensure that LGBT employees feel comfortable with being open about their sexuality.

There are also clear issues for the LGBT Community around long-term unemployment and lack of adult training and education with regard to re-entry into the labour market. LGBT people have often been forced to leave school early on account of their sexual orientation, leaving them with fewer qualifications and job skills. Young LGBT people often enter into a cycle of short-term employment and job insecurity for the same reasons. In the past, sexual orientation has not been taken into account as a source of long-term unemployment and job insecurity and its attendant effects.

- Advertisement of positions in the LGBT Community press and with LGBT Community organisations
- Access to counselling in the workplace
- Clear channels to deal with homophobic harassment
- Maintenance of a non-threatening work environment
- Availability of information on LGBT organisations especially within the trade unions
- Issues around long-term unemployment and job insecurity
- Adult education and training
- Clear statement of equality of opportunity in job advertisements

Health and Welfare

The LGBT Community often has specialised needs when it comes to healthcare, issues of well-being and in regard to social services both in terms of access and treatment.

Examples of some of the health and welfare issues which are important to the LGBT Community are:

- Training of health workers, mental health professionals, and social workers concerning issues of sexual orientation
- Mental health issues / pathologising of sexual orientation
- Hospital visitation rights for same-sex partners
- Information on LGBT services and organisations made freely available and distributed in hospitals, GP surgeries, GUM clinics, public libraries, and so on
- Maintenance of confidentiality
- Reversal of the current ban on blood donations from gay men
- Sexual health education which does not forget the special needs of lesbians
- Reproductive rights and access to IVF
- Availability of condoms and dental dams in public buildings
- Treatment of LGBT patients in nursing homes
- Benefit entitlements, social security issues
- Consideration of LGBT people's social, psychological and spiritual welfare
- Treatment of LGBT prisoners: sexual health, conjugal visits, issues around HIV/AIDS status, such as medication regimes
- End to recording of sexual orientation of patient on patient's medical records, e.g. by GPs, for non-medical reasons. This practice can lead to discrimination against LGBT people by insurance companies.