

Pride in Our Workforce: Understanding the Impact of the Workforce on LGBT+ Participation

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Introduction

Workforce development is essential for supporting people to be more physically active. Previous insight suggests that those who deliver sport and physical activity don't necessarily need to be "like me", but just need to "get me" (Energise Me, 2018).

Research suggests that people from the LGBT+ community tend to be less active than heterosexual people (Public Health, 2014). Yet, as a sector, little is known about their barriers to participation. Therefore, funding

was sought from Sport England to undertake primary research to understand the impact of the sport and physical activity workforce on LGBT+ participation, in order to improve workforce provision and opportunities for LGBT+ communities in Hampshire and beyond.

The research sought to explore:

- the role the sport and physical activity workforce plays in the LGBT+ community accessing physical activity and sport and how it influences participant experience

- actual and perceived barriers to participation and the skills, competencies and behaviours required of the sport and physical activity workforce to overcome these to engage the LGBT+ community and improve experiences
- whether the current sport and physical activity workforce is representative of the local population in Hampshire and, if not, how it could be more representative of the LGBT+ community.

This research is still underway and this paper presents the key findings from the quantitative phase of the research, presented at the UK Coaching Applied Research Conference in 2020.

Method

The research adopted a qualitative and quantitative approach. The quantitative element comprised an online questionnaire (n= 352), which included three targeted audiences (LGBT+ participants, LGBT+ workforce and non-LGBT+ workforce). Face-to-face interviews and focus groups are currently underway with four interviews and two focus groups having been conducted so far with the three targeted audiences. Participants were predominantly recruited from the Hampshire region via established relationships with organisations who support the LGBT+ community. However, to boost the sample, key national partners were approached to promote the survey across the country.

For the workforce (those who support access to, lead or deliver sport and physical activity), a key area of exploration was how comfortable people felt expressing their gender identity or sexual orientation within their role. For participants, a key focus

of the survey was exploring participants' perceptions of competency of the workforce. Across nine workforce attributes (adaptable, approachable, experienced, inclusive, informative, motivating, qualified, supportive and understanding), LGBT+ participants were asked to rate 1) the importance of that attribute, and 2) how well the workforce performed it. The difference between both ratings was calculated in order to identify the greatest needs for learning and development within the workforce.

Results¹

The analysis of the quantitative data collected from the sport and physical activity workforce suggests:

- those who identified as heterosexual were overrepresented in the workforce and those who identified with minority gender identity and sexual orientation groups were underrepresented
- those who identified as heterosexual felt more comfortable expressing their gender identity or sexual orientation in their workforce role, compared to their LGBT+ community counterparts

The analysis of the quantitative data collected from LGBT+ participants engaging in sport and physical activity suggests:

- there was little difference in participants' ratings of the workforce across the nine attributes detailed above, by gender
- however, those who identified as Trans were more likely to feel that the workforce did not demonstrate the necessary levels of understanding, inclusivity, approachability and adaptability based on their perceived importance

¹This study was exploratory in nature and focussed on the need to learn about a vulnerable and hard to reach population. As a result, the sample size is small and caution needs to be taken when interpreting and generalising these findings.

- similar trends were observed for sexual orientation. Participants identifying as bisexual, gay (male and female), lesbian and asexual orientations were more likely to feel that the workforce did not demonstrate the required level of understanding, supportiveness, inclusivity, approachability, motivation and adaptability as desired.

Implications of research for coaching

The quantitative findings of this research show that the LGBT+ community is underrepresented in the sport and physical activity workforce. In addition, members of the LGBT+ community expressed greater discomfort to disclose sexual orientation and gender, compared to the heterosexual community. Therefore, there needs to be consideration of how best to support the LGBT+ community to become involved in the delivery of sport and physical activity and to feel comfortable expressing their sexual and gender orientations within their role.

Based on participant ratings, softer skills (such as supportiveness) are a key attribute, and as such there is a need for the workforce to have opportunities to develop these skills so that they are appropriately skilled and knowledgeable to provide a person-centred experience to participants. One way in which these skills could be developed is via targeted learning programmes, such as the Supporting the Person in Front of You workshop (an adaptation by Energise Me of the UK Coaching, Coaching the Person in Front of You workshop), which focuses on building meaningful connections in all interactions.

It is also important to note that the LGBT+ community is not a homogeneous group and that, as with all interactions, a respectful, purposeful and individual approach should be applied. It is also

important to ensure that phrases such as 'inclusive' are not loosely applied to all workforce interactions and environments, without the appropriate consideration for the participants' experience, feelings and expectations.

Creating open environments and encouraging the workforce to discuss intentional support and action will be pivotal. Use of role play scenarios could ensure that people feel comfortable when engaging with participants or a workforce from different demographics.

References

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