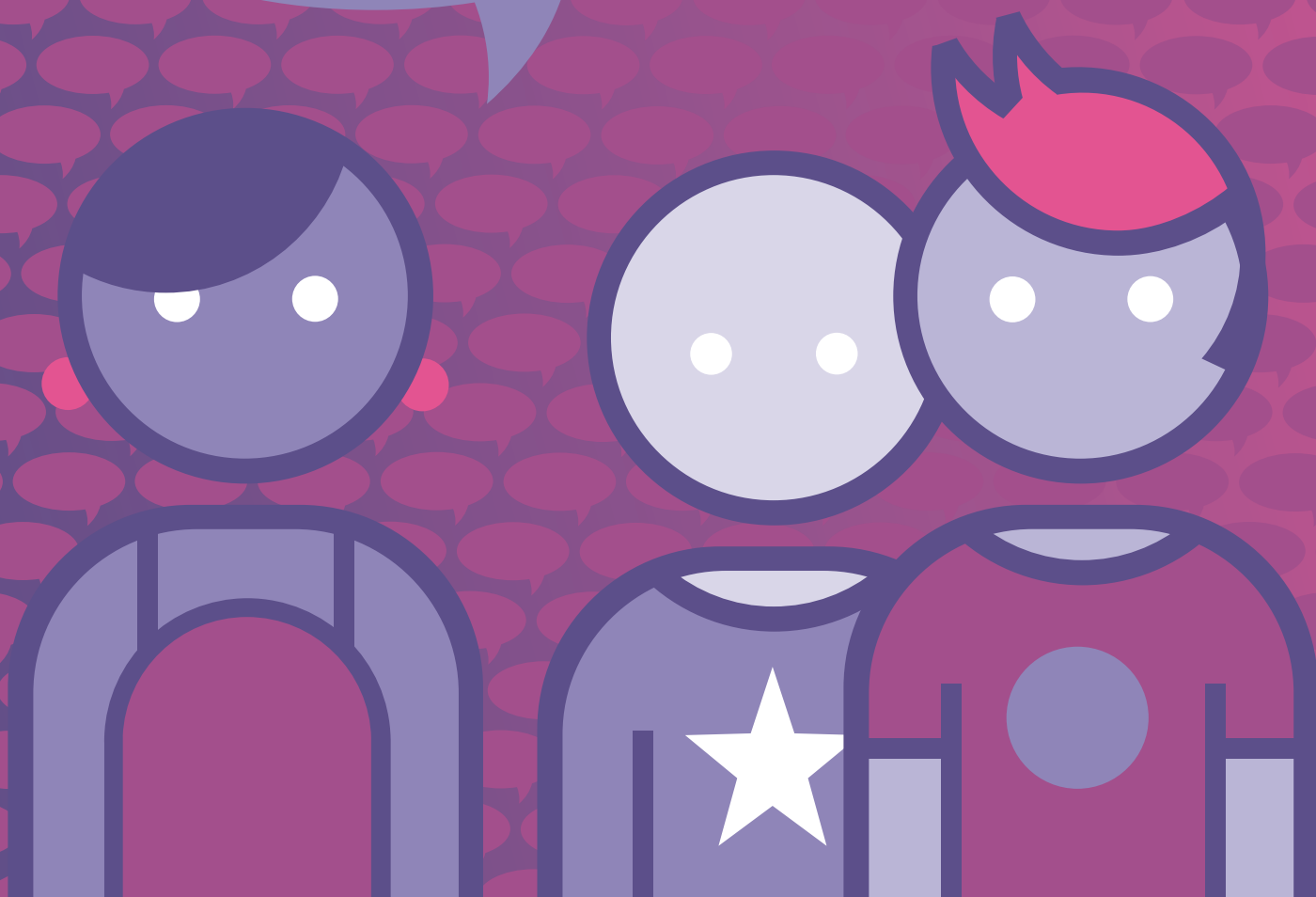


# SERVICE WITH A SMILE?

DO LESBIAN,  
GAY, BISEXUAL AND  
TRANSGENDER PEOPLE  
GET FAIR TREATMENT  
IN PUBLIC SERVICE?



# INTRODUCTION

Up until now, we have had no way of knowing how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are treated when using public services in Scotland, how they feel about their treatment and what would improve their experiences. Through our work with public services we know that staff often don't fully understand how their work might negatively impact on LGBT people or recognise how direct or indirect discrimination might occur.

As part of the Good Practice Programme Stonewall Scotland has been working with public services to get policies and practices right and raise staff awareness. In 2006 Scottish Government research showed that all local authorities in Scotland ranked LGBT equality as their lowest priority of the equality strands. The Good Practice Programme was established by the Scottish Government to tackle these issues across public services in Scotland.

"Service with a smile?" is the first research of its kind in Scotland and will help public services to better understand the needs of their LGBT service users. There were 252 responses to the survey; of those responses, 247 were usable, non-duplicated responses. This is the largest survey to date of LGBT people's experiences of public services in Scotland. People took the time to tell us their stories, good and bad; they took time to tell us what would make them feel more comfortable and what is important to them when using a service.

People use public services like the police, the ambulance service, the prison service and social services when they are at their most vulnerable, so it is crucial they know they will not receive bad or inappropriate treatment because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

## CONTENTS

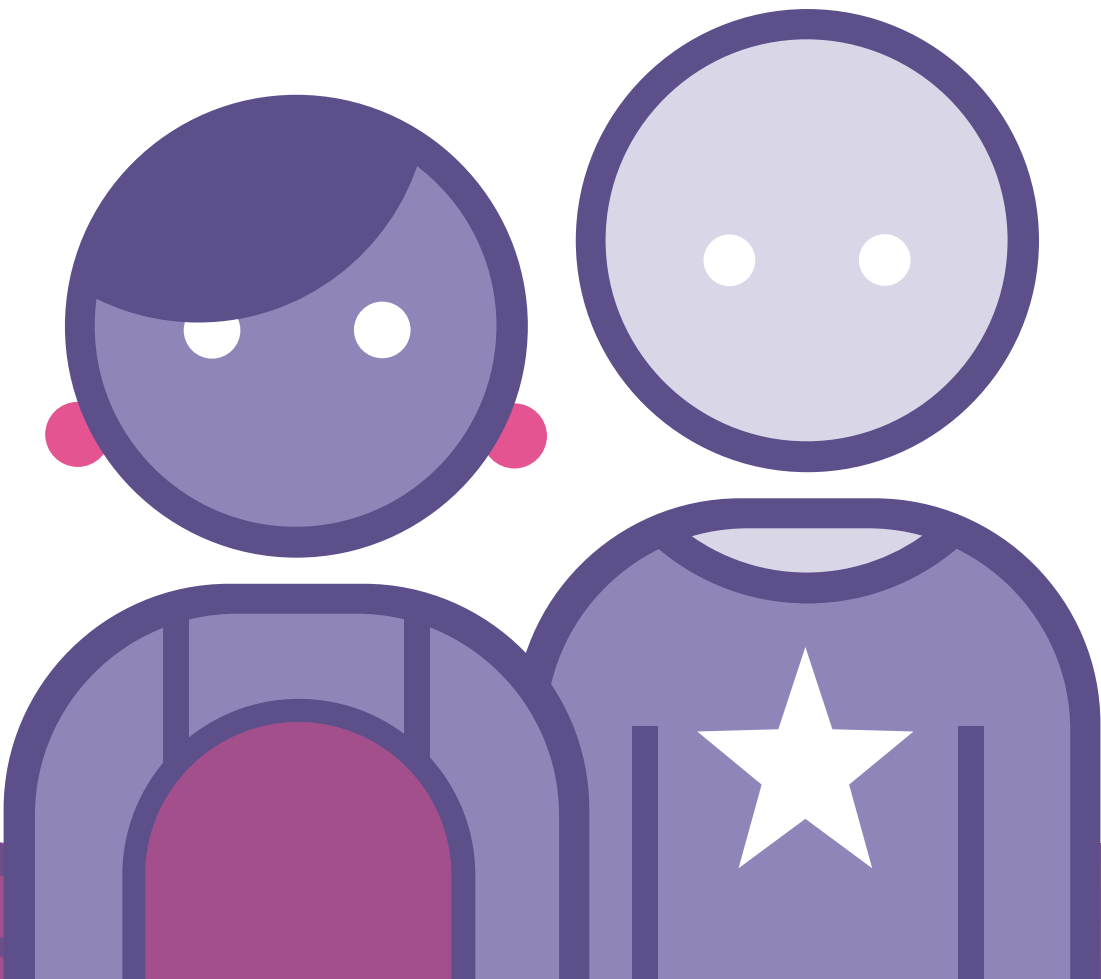
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|--|---|
|  1. KEY FINDINGS            |  5. CHANGES         |
|  2. EXPERIENCES OF SERVICES |  6. RECOMMENDATIONS |
|  3. BAD EXPERIENCES         |  7. METHODOLOGY     |
|  4. GOOD EXPERIENCES        |  8. THE SURVEY      |



I worry about coming out to service providers as I am concerned that I will receive a lesser service once they know I am gay. Will they treat me differently, will they have a negative reaction or will they just not get it and I will have to spend an already stressful situation explaining to someone who I am and why that is important to the way they provide me with that service?

# 1. KEY FINDINGS

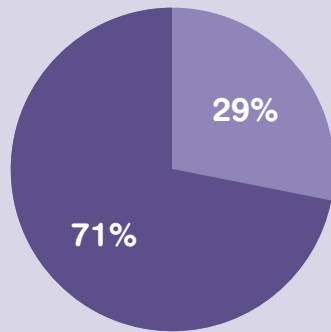
- 7 IN 10 LGBT PEOPLE HAVE HAD A PUBLIC SERVANT ASSUME THEY WERE STRAIGHT
- MORE THAN HALF HAVE CONCEALED THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY WHEN USING A PUBLIC SERVICE
- 6 IN 10 ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE REACTION THEY WOULD GET IF THEY 'CAME OUT' TO A PUBLIC SERVICE
- MORE THAN HALF FEAR DISCRIMINATION FROM STAFF AND OTHER SERVICE USERS
- A THIRD ARE WORRIED, NERVOUS OR APPREHENSIVE ABOUT HAVING TO COME OUT BEFORE ACCESSING A SERVICE
- MORE THAN HALF THINK THAT PUBLIC SERVICES ONLY CONSIDER THEIR NEEDS SOMETIMES
- 71% WOULD FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE USING A PUBLIC SERVICE IF THEY KNEW THE ORGANISATION HAD A PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY
- 68% WOULD FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE IF STAFF STOPPED MAKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THEM
- MORE THAN HALF SAY ORGANISATIONS SHOULD DISPLAY LGBT LEAFLETS AND INFORMATION
- PEOPLE REPORTED THE MOST NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES USING LOCAL COUNCIL FACILITIES



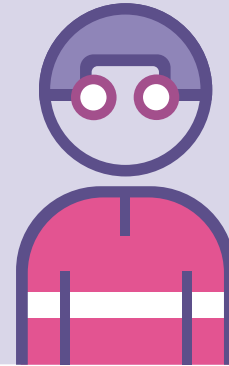
## 2. EXPERIENCES OF SERVICES

The survey asked questions focusing specifically on LGBT people's experiences when accessing public services in Scotland.

CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN A PUBLIC SERVICE ASSUMED YOU WERE 'STRAIGHT'?



Yes 71%  
No 29%



Of the 173 people who answered 'Yes' to the above question, a further 157 went on to answer a follow up question; 'How did it make you feel?' These are a sample of the responses:

Like a second class citizen – like requesting anything specific to my needs would be a problem; too much trouble.

Angry and upset.

Sorta good as I knew that I would be safe on my journey, if he thought I was straight the rest of the passengers maybe thought the same.

Uncomfortable.

**This is the normal assumption that is made and when you have to correct it, it is making a vulnerable situation – that caused you to seek assistance – even worse.**

**That I wouldn't be listened to.**

Very, very awkward!

**Invisible, unwanted and different.**

That public service workers are simply not LGBT aware and don't get the right training, equally that employers are more tolerant of discriminatory attitudes to LGBT people than other equality groups.

**As though I should correct them – but I was too nervous to.**

It made me shake my head and sigh (here we go again), but I'm used to it.

Different.

It's always just an odd feeling – should you say something, shouldn't you... but it does make you feel like the service isn't for you.

Awkward, frustrated excluded, vulnerable, like I am being singled out for who I fancy – just want to be able to use the service like everyone else.

Not bad, just aware of it.

Like LGBT people are never really considered.

Irritated, frustrated, angry and that they are pretty unprofessional to make that kind of assumption. It also gets really tiring, having to correct people. Sometimes I even say wife and she – yet they hear husband and he.

Annoyed- it happens ALL the time.

It happens constantly – to varying degrees of severity. Sometimes I have to let it go and pick the times where it is important or particularly relevant to the issue... 'cause you don't have the energy to challenge it all the time. The times where you let it go you feel you are being untrue to yourself. Generally I let it go more often because there is the added element of fear...'

Sometimes I correct them, sometimes I can't be bothered.

Happens all the time – makes me feel uncomfortable – like I am lying if I don't say something to the contrary.

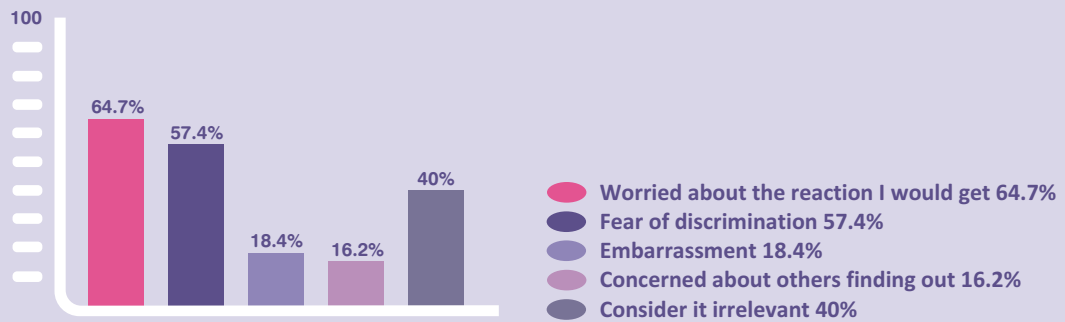
Kinda awkward – having to make a split second decision on whether and how to challenge.

Frustrated.

Dismissed, ignored – not a whole person.

The survey asked whether the respondent had or would ever conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity when using a public service. More than half the respondents selected 'yes'. They were then asked to choose the most appropriate reasons from a list. They were able to tick all that applied.

## WHY WOULD YOU CONCEAL YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY?



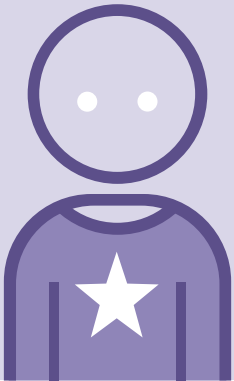
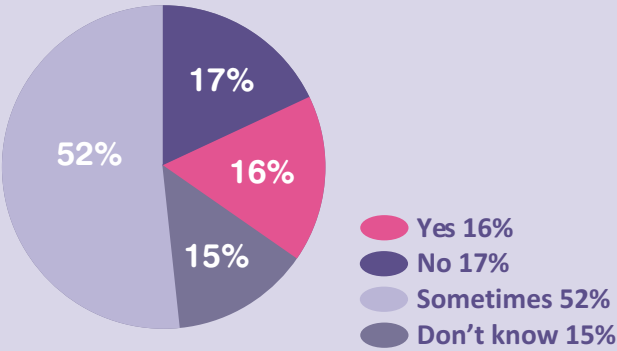
When asked about whether the respondents were worried, nervous or apprehensive about having to 'come out' before accessing a service, a third said they were. A third said that they didn't think about it beforehand and a third reported that they were not worried, nervous or apprehensive about coming out while accessing a public service. Those who answered in the affirmative were asked to describe why they felt this way. Responses included:





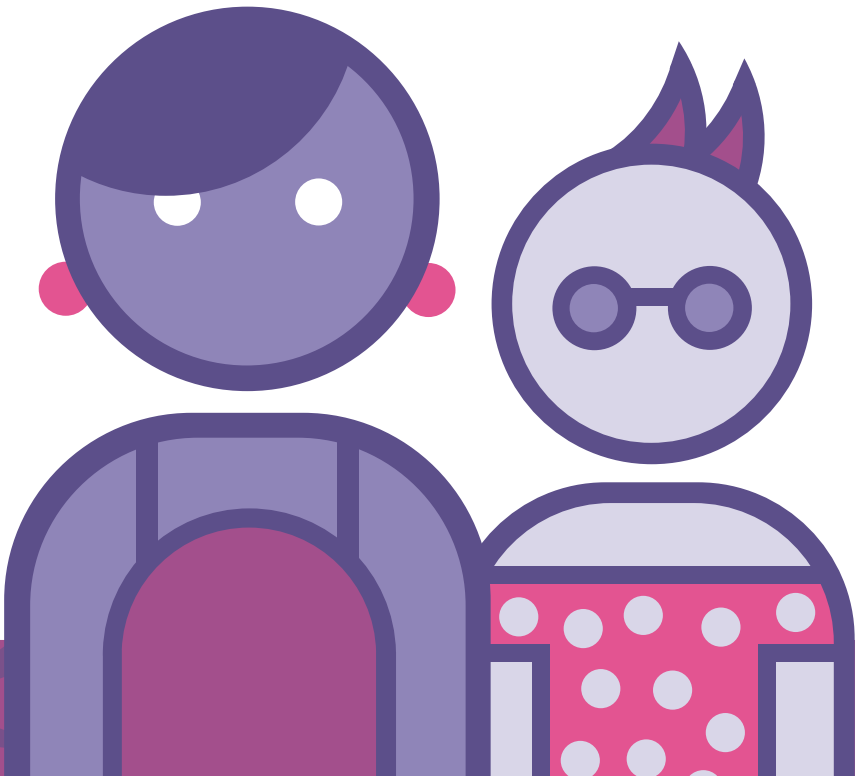
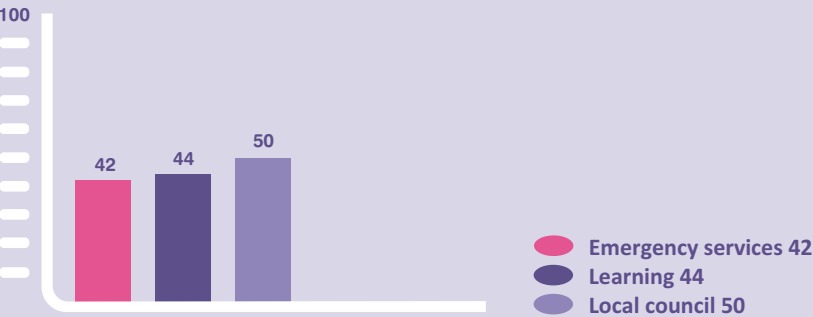
The respondents were asked to think about whether public services considered their needs.

DO YOU THINK PUBLIC SERVICES CONSIDER YOUR NEEDS WHEN THEY DELIVER THEIR SERVICES?



The survey then asked the respondents to think about their experiences with different services, including the emergency services, learning (i.e. school, college, university, adult learning) and local council facilities (i.e. leisure, transport, education, social work, housing). The most negative experiences were reported in learning and local council facilities.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES



### 3. BAD EXPERIENCES

The respondents were asked to tell us about their bad experiences of public services. More than half of the respondents chose to fill in a text box to tell us about their bad experiences. Here is a sample of their answers.

Refuse to accept name change, allowed bullying at college and my school.

I was recovering in hospital after an operation. My boyfriend came to visit me regularly and an old man opposite me in the ward regularly swore at me and made homophobic comments. When I told the nurse that I didn't like his behaviour, she said "maybe he doesn't like your behaviour".

I was in hospital and my girlfriend came to visit and one of the nurses said we were acting inappropriately when we kissed where as they left another heterosexual couple well alone.

Being accused of being a man in the ladies toilets.

School – I was being bullied because of sexuality and the teachers did nothing.

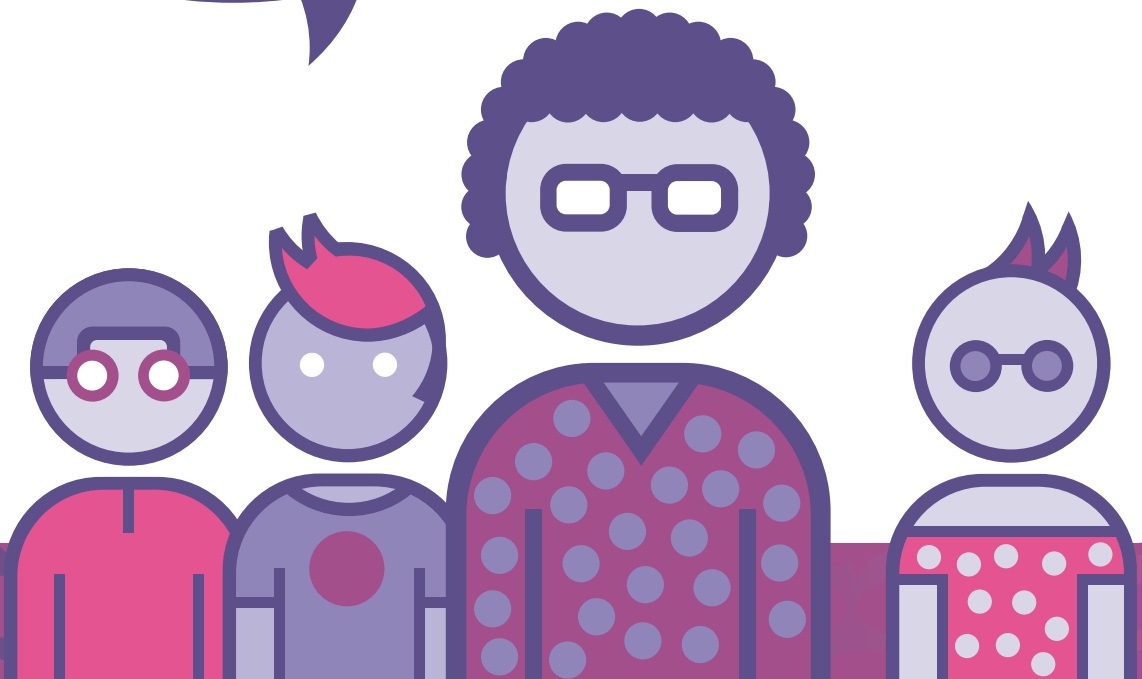
Council - was spoken about within earshot and could hear what was said.

Social worker in Kilmarnock allowed a verbal homophobic attack in a meeting.

Homophobic RE teachers and English teachers making comments and general ignorance.

The housing department have not helped with my housing problem due to homophobic abuse.

Some people assume you're straight they unknowingly say offensive things during conversation.





School! They just told me it was a phase and that was that... No help at all.

Went to a catholic school so never would have felt able to come out, although a few years after I left my sister's friend did come out to her guidance teacher, and the reaction she received was very negative. She was basically told it was wrong and she should get a boyfriend.

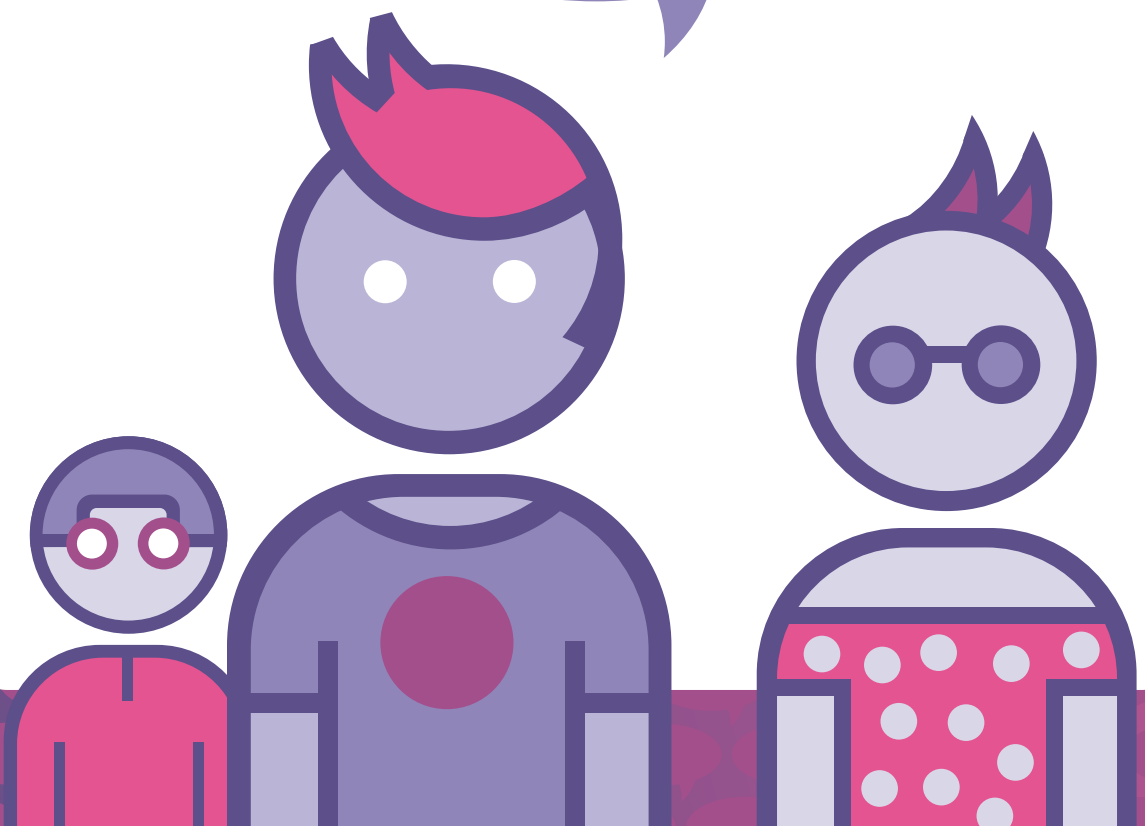
I can think of lots of times - generally the bad treatment ranges from things that aren't pleasant but manageable (ie assuming that I am straight) to people being nasty. I tend to put the 'more manageable' stuff to one side but over a long period of time of it happening a lot - it can get you really down.

The housing people still treat you differently.

When taken into A&E I was asked if my partner was waiting for me, the nurse said she would go get "him" and what was his name, I told her it was a she and my girlfriends name. When finding out my partner was female they did not bother to go get her even though i was very distressed.

I was refused entrance to a leisure centre as they stated that I may offend other service users.

When I had pneumonia ... the hospital consultant told me that, because of my life style, it may well be HIV related.



## 4. GOOD EXPERIENCES

The respondents were then asked a similar question about their positive experiences of public services. 126 respondents chose to complete this section. It was interesting to see that many of the examples indicate that the respondents had quite low expectations. Here are some of their responses:

**Police not making assumptions on 2 occasions.**

I have received an excellent service recently from mental health services they knew I was gay and took the time to consult both me and my partners about my careplan. They were not afraid to mention the word gay and at no time at all did their reaction or attitude change when discussing my partner.

High school- the school were very helpful when I came out at 17 and even helped me manage the process.

There have been very positive commitments made by local police.

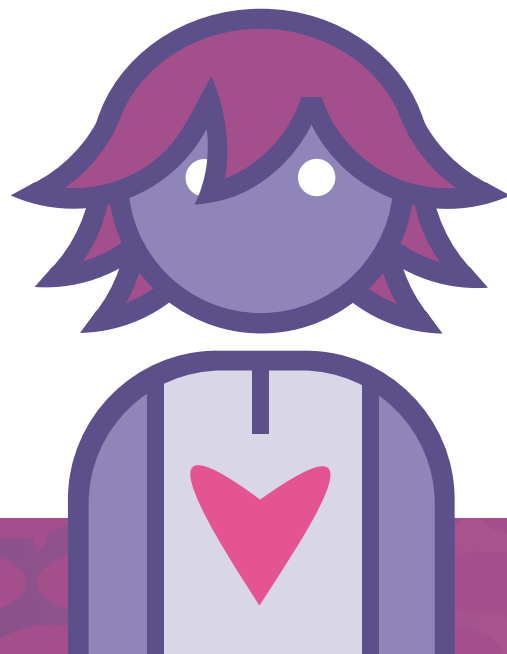
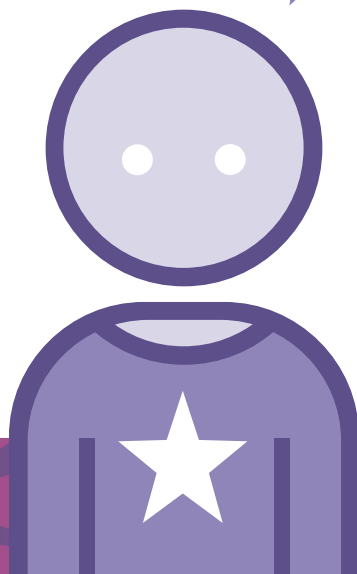
**The police and ambulance have treated me with the utmost respect.**

I wish! People are fine about me being gay, but they are uninformed or misinformed at best.

Police helped majorly with homophobic verbal abuse.

**I had to call an ambulance for my ex after she became ill and the paramedics were very supportive and provided me with the information I needed as her partner, rather than just as a friend.**

Police were great at dealing with an assault case that happened on the bus because my friends and I were deemed different by a group of younger girls. The police dealt with it in a very professional manner.



Police 3 or 4 years ago distributing leaflets to LGBT venues saying they were committed to helping LGBT people.

Yes. About two months ago my car window was smashed by some local thugs and homophobic abuse was given by them too. The attending police officers were wonderful, very sympathetic as I was very shaken (first time I'd ever been the victim of such a crime). They never caught the perpetrators, but kept me fully informed of the investigation. I can't praise their response enough.

Midwives when I had both my children (1 and 3 years ago) - they simply dealt with my situation as it was and treated me as an individual. One did initially ask my partner's name as "he", but apologised when I corrected her.

I have had great treatment from the University, public services and from gay men's health. They have accommodated me and met me where I was at to help me. Specifically, this is in regards to the counselling service.

I have had good experiences but I can't think of a time that I have been out and someone has still given me really good service.

Having lived in London and Edinburgh I do feel that been openly 'gay' in London is a great deal more accepted than in Scotland. Generally the way in which I got treated from all different levels in the public service in London was fantastic. From buying a tube ticket or talking to the dustman or dealing with building planning application people seemed light years ahead in attitude than in Scotland. I feel that in Southern England it is not 'accepted' to be gay it is 'normal' though in Scotland it is only 'accepted' and that is not at every socioeconomic level. To answer the question I have never had a particularly good experience in Scotland.

My local council seems to bend over backwards (at least in its literature) to be inclusive, e.g. my library stocks gay magazines and community info.



## 5. CHANGES

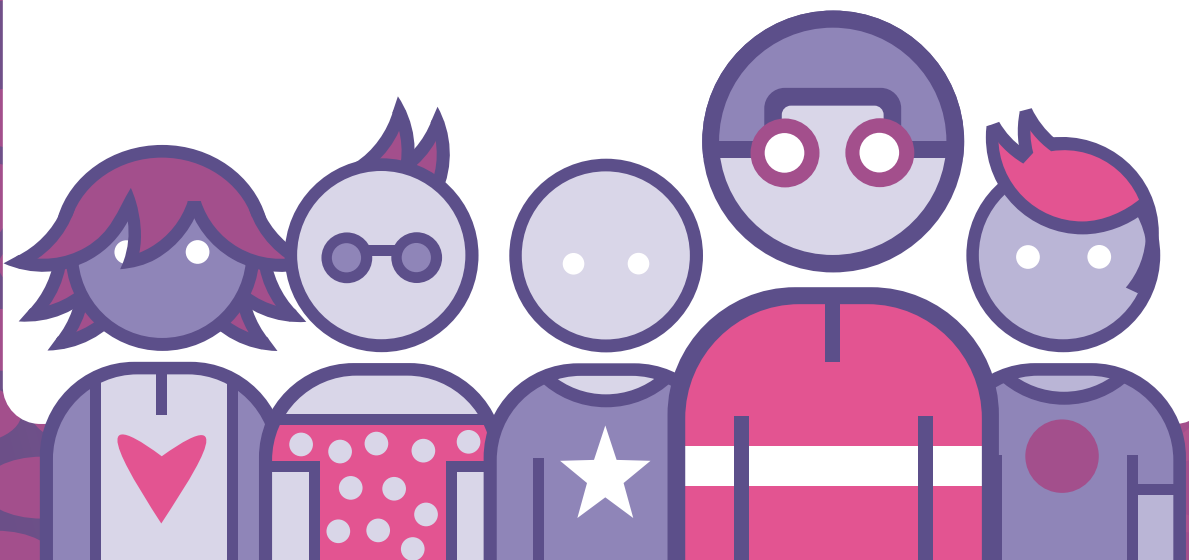
The respondents were asked to consider what changes could be made to make them feel more comfortable using a public service. Respondents were asked to tick all answers that apply. This question was answered by 237 people. They were asked to select from a list but were also provided with a 'other' box, where they could record their own ideas.

### WHAT CHANGES COULD BE MADE TO MAKE YOU MORE COMFORTABLE USING A PUBLIC SERVICE?



Suggested changes included:

- “People having a true understanding of needs of gay people.”
- “Staff that are informed and knowledgeable about LGBT issues.”
- “Promotion of lgbt equality in all areas of work.”
- “Education, education, education!”
- “Transgender awareness training for staff.”
- “More friendly staff and polished service, like you would expect at a 5 star hotel.”
- “Knowing that staff are trained.”
- “Training top down in both Equality & Diversity issues and training to defeat institutionalised homophobia.”
- “Service providers using inclusive language and being comfortable about my sexual orientation if it does come up.”



## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

LGBT people surveyed made a series of practical recommendations based on what would make them feel more comfortable using a public service.

### 1. PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY

71% said that knowing that an organisation had a public commitment to equality would make them feel more comfortable using the service.

“When fire service officers refused to leaflet Pride Scotia in 2006 the officers were subject to disciplinary action, so I know it didn’t pass without incident.”

“There have been very positive commitments made by the police.”

### 2. DON’T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

68% said that staff not making assumptions would have a positive impact on the way they felt.

“Some people assume you’re straight then unknowingly say offensive things during conversations.”

“I was applying for housing, when they asked me who else would live with me they presumed that I needed two bedrooms because they thought my partner was a friend ‘cause she was a woman. It slipped out that I’d be happy with a one bedroom flat. The council worker went bright red.”

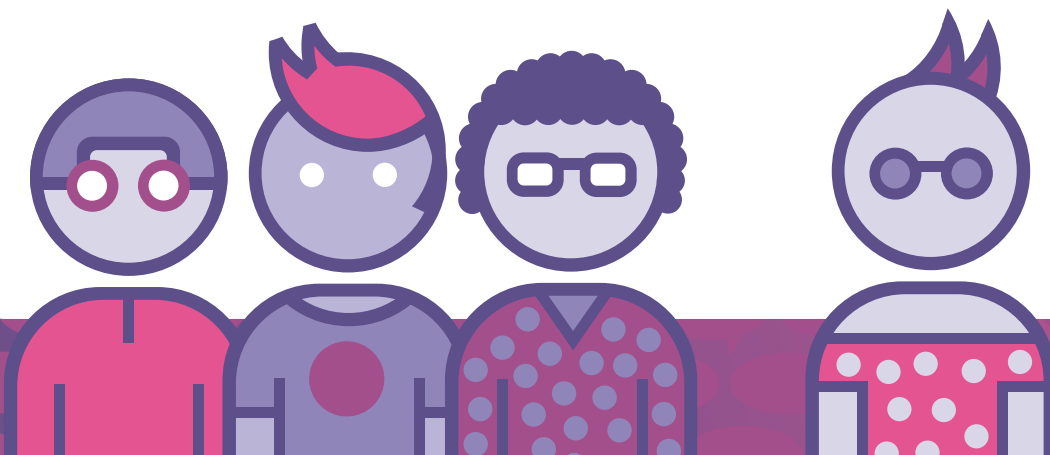
“When they [public services] assume that I’m straight it makes me feel irritated, frustrated, angry and that they are pretty unprofessional to make that kind of assumption. It also gets really tiring having to correct people. Sometimes you even say wife and she, yet they hear husband and he.”

### 3. VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

61% thought including images that represent LGBT people in publications and adverts would make a difference to them.

Respondents said posters in public spaces such as libraries did a lot to increase awareness and visibility of LGBT people. People thought this could be replicated elsewhere. One group talked about a local public service who refused to display LGBT helpline posters and the negative impact that had on the service, but also on the trust of LGBT people accessing that service in the future.

“You see a lot of effort to combat racial discrimination, there are posters all over, but not one that mentions LGBT.”



#### 4. LEAFLETS AND INFORMATION

52% thought if organisations displayed leaflets or information about LGBT issues, it would make them feel more comfortable.

“There is a lack information about sexuality so LGBT people feel isolated.”

#### 5. TRAINING

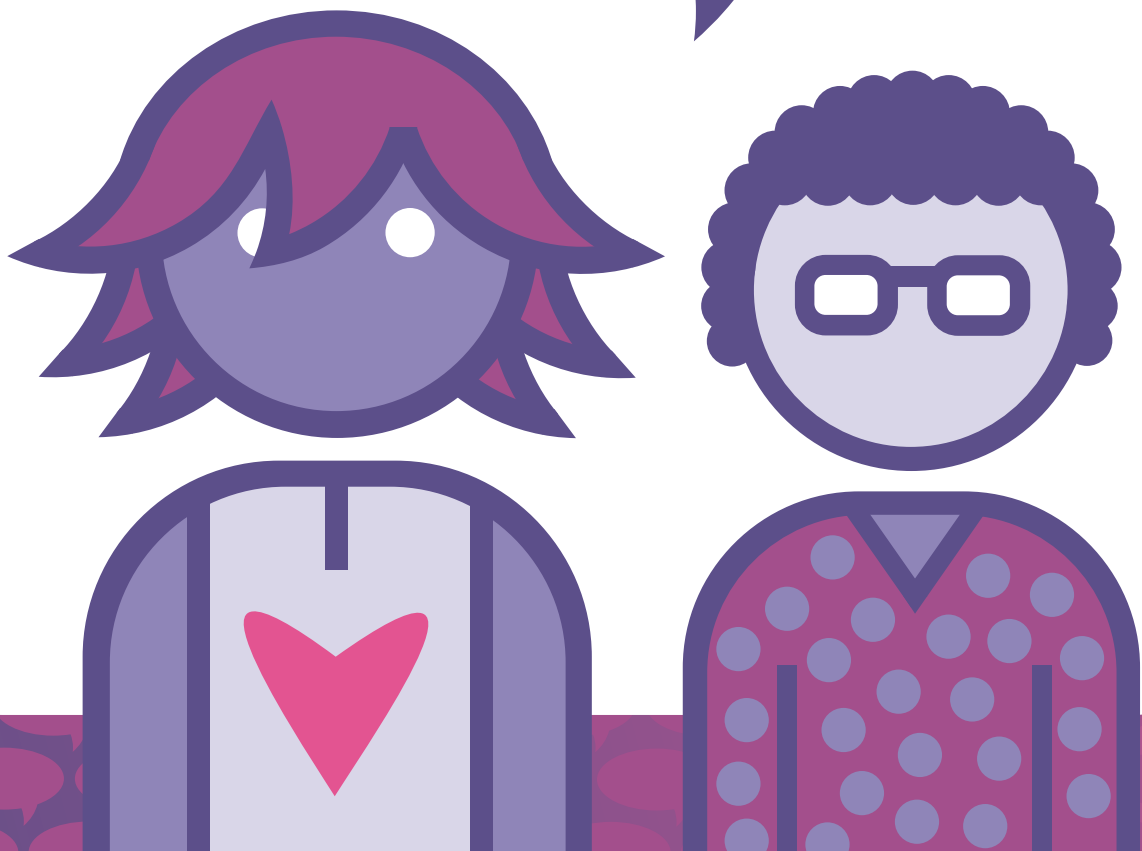
The respondents spoke a lot about a lack of knowledge and understanding of LGBT issues among public servants.

“I had pneumonia, the hospital consultant told me that, because of my lifestyle, it may well be HIV related. In reality he know nothing about my lifestyle which was actually very low risk.”

“Public service workers are simply not LGBT aware and don’t get the right training, it seems that people are more tolerant of discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT people than other equality groups.”

“Education, Education, Education!”

All of the above and also it would be helpful to get to a point where you know that you could be out without worrying about it and having to come out - it would be good if it were just like asking anything else. It will take a while for everyone to understand what it’s like living this life.





## 7. METHODOLOGY

The survey and focus groups were designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data in the following areas:

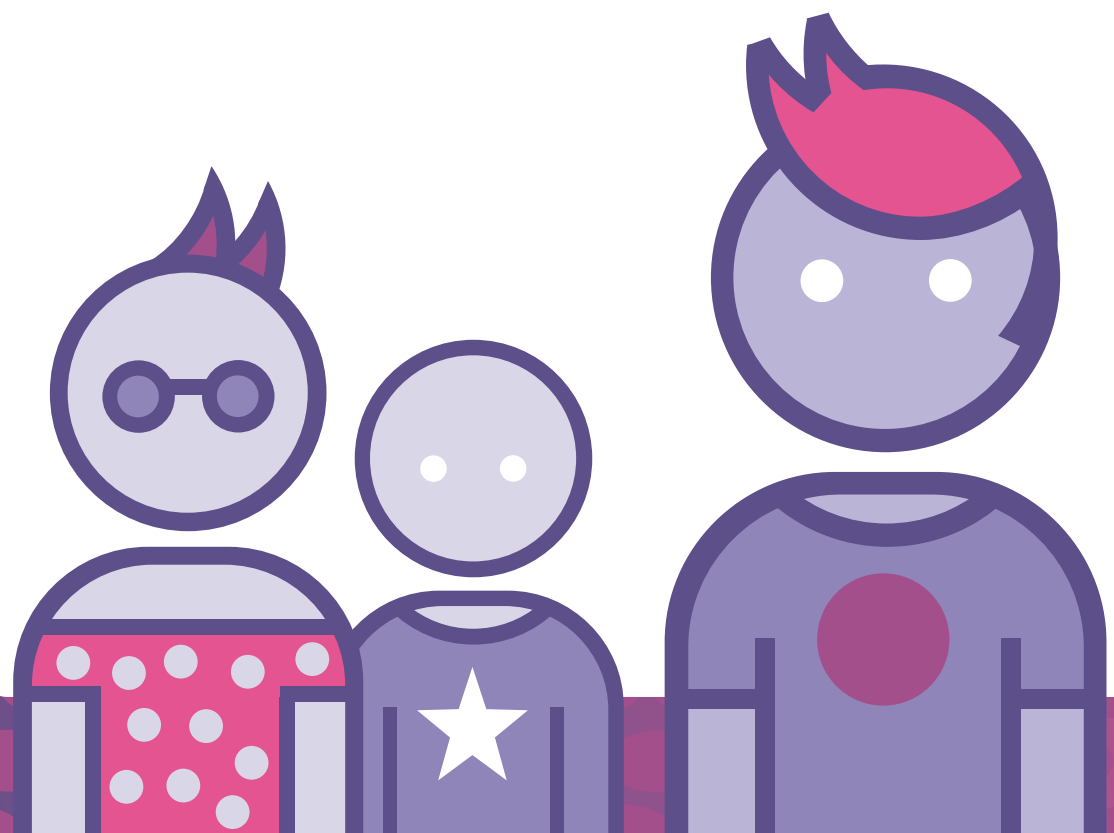
- **The basic demographics:**
  - Where do people responding to the survey live?**
  - How do they define their gender?**
  - How do they define their gender identity and sexual orientation?**
- **What do LGBT people feel would make a difference to them when accessing public services?**
- **LGBT people's experiences (good and bad) of public services in Scotland**

The survey was available online and paper copies were taken to local events such as Pride Glasgow, Dumfries Pride and the Borders LGBT group. More detailed interviews were held and a representative from Stonewall Scotland attended LGBT social and support groups throughout the country to ensure that the responses provided a good geographical coverage.

There were 252 responses to the survey; of those responses, 247 were usable, non-duplicated responses. This is the largest survey to date of LGBT people's experiences of a broad range of public services in Scotland.

The closest comparator is the Lesbian Health Survey, which looked at Lesbian and Bisexual women's experiences of Health Services in Scotland. 514 responses were gathered in Scotland, and over 5000 in the UK. This is the largest survey of lesbian and bisexual women in the world.

Some figures are presented in summary form rather than percentages. Full statistics are available on request.



## 7. THE SURVEY

The 'about you' section of the survey asked the respondents to fill in four questions about themselves. We asked the following questions:

**How do you describe your gender?**

**Do you consider yourself to be within any of the following categories?**

- ☐ FTM / trans man
- ☐ MTF / trans woman
- ☐ Intersex person
- ☐ Androgyny / polygender person
- ☐ Cross-dressing / transvestite person
- ☐ Other type of transgender person (please specify in open comment box)
- ☐ None of the above

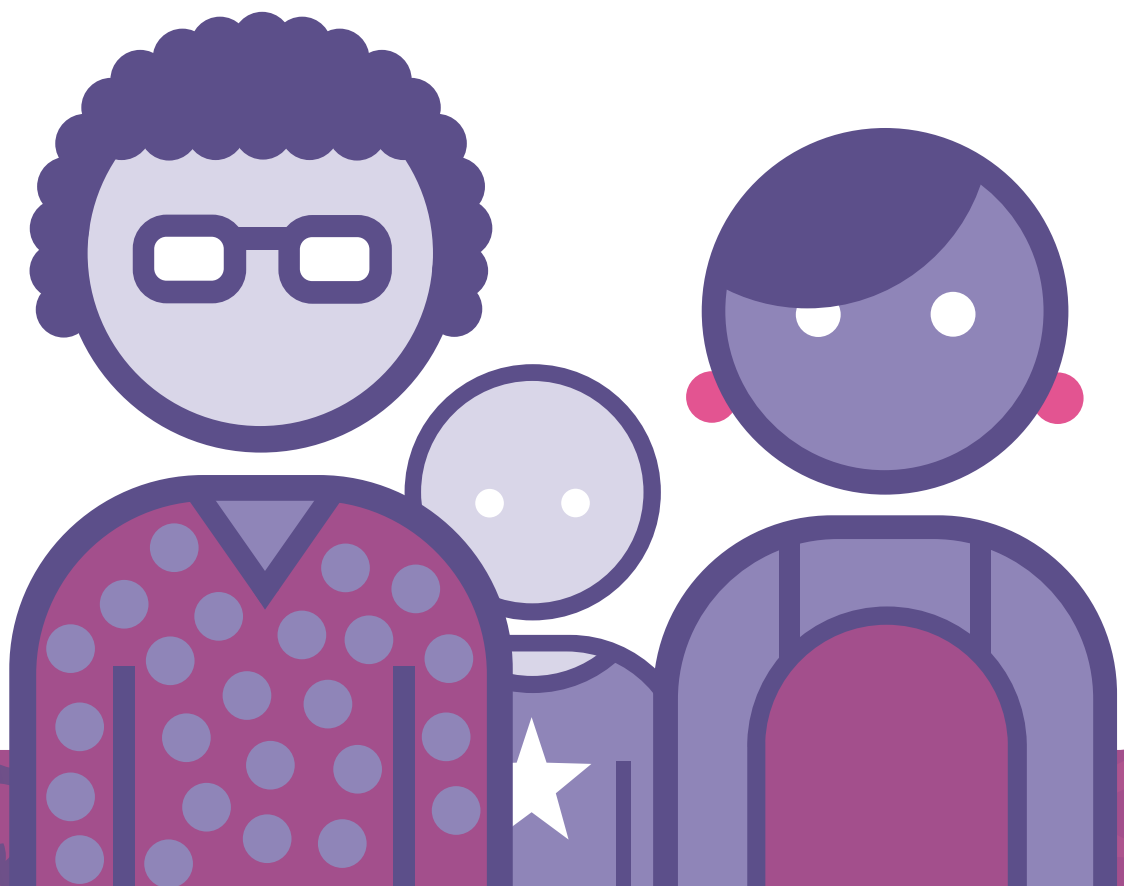
**How do you describe your sexual orientation?**

- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Gay Man
- ☐ Gay Woman / Lesbian
- ☐ Heterosexual / Straight
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other (please specify in open comment box)

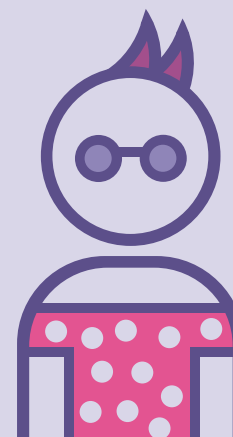
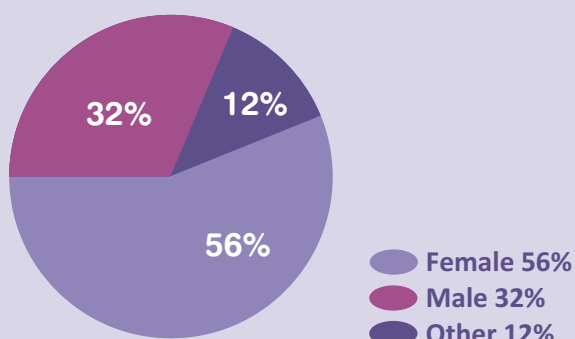
**What area of Scotland do you live in?**

**Please input the first two letters of your postcode.**

These questions were asked to allow us to gain knowledge about how the respondents identified, in terms of their gender identity and sexual orientation. This information is particularly interesting to us as it provides us with current and up-to-date information about how LGBT people identify themselves.

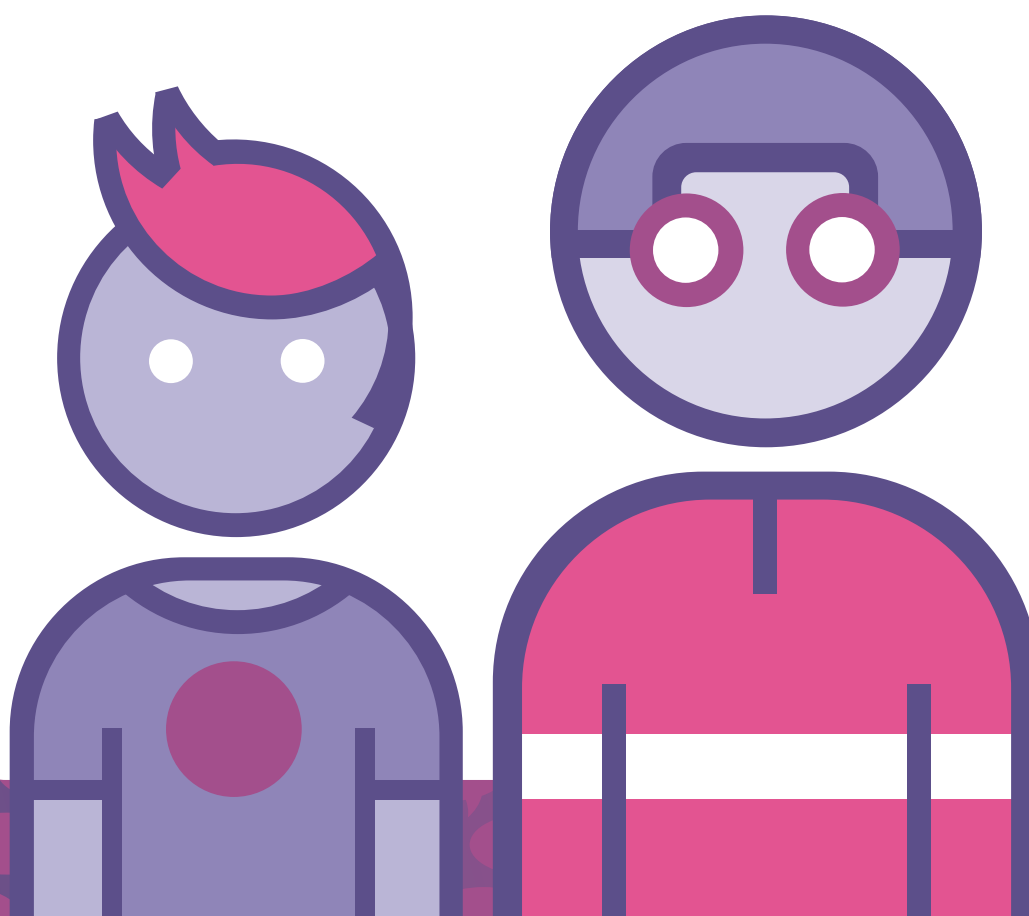


## HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR GENDER?

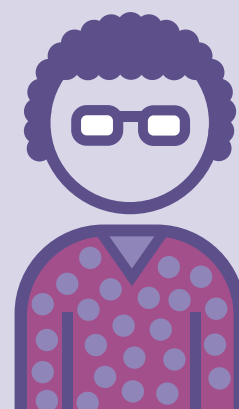
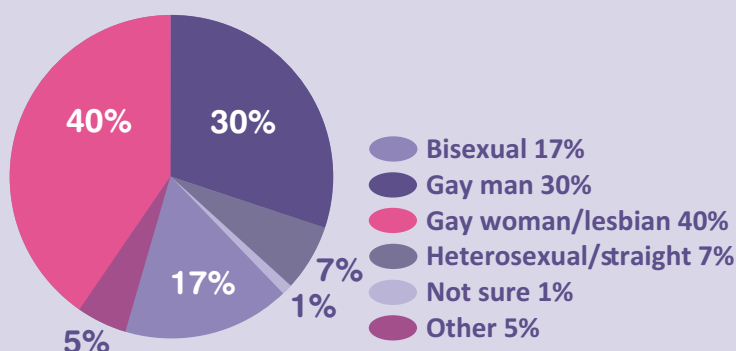


To answer the question above, respondents were not required to select either male or female from a checklist; they were given an open box to enable respondents who may wish to record their gender variance. 12% of respondents chose not to identify as either male or female. Some of the answers that are for this purpose recorded as 'other' were as follows: gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, just me, queer, mixed, and fluid.

Respondents were given the opportunity to record their gender identity in an open question – a list of categories were provided, including an 'other' tick box, which then invited the candidates to record their gender identity in their own words. Of the 218 people who answered this question, 3.2% (7) of the people filling in the survey selected 'other'. 6 of those respondents went on to give more information on how they describe their gender identity, the answers were as follows; queer, just me – not sure, gender queer, transgender (trying not to feel too limited by gender expectations). Identities described as intersex, polygender/androgynous and cross-dressing/transvestite each accounted for 1.4% of the responses. 3.2% of the respondents recorded their gender identity as FTM (female to male) and 0.5% as MTF (male to female) transsexual. The remaining 89.9% recorded that they identified as 'none of the above'.

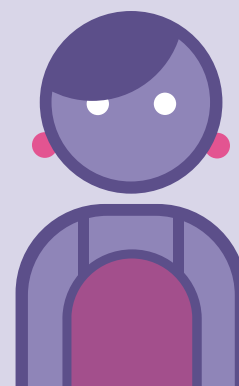
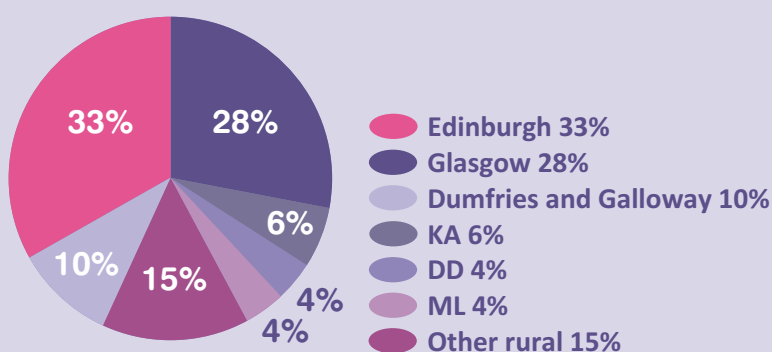


## HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?



It was made clear when the survey was advertised that we were seeking responses from LGBT people. It is worth noting that people who identify as transgender may or may not also identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

## WHAT AREA OF SCOTLAND DO YOU LIVE IN?



We were also looking to establish where in Scotland the respondents lived, this was allow us to identify where our work was reaching and to allow us to see if there was any particular region that was experiencing particularly poor services. At the outset, it was hoped that asking the respondent's postcode may help us to pinpoint areas where there was no engagement and where further work would need to be prioritised in the next three years of the Good Practice Programme. When analysing the postcode results, the majority of the respondents were from the central belt. Of the 240 respondents who answered this question, 148 (62%) lived in the central belt. The top three areas where we had positive response rates were Glasgow (69), Edinburgh (79) and Dumfries (24). It should be noted however, that Stonewall Scotland staff attended both Glasgow and Dumfries Pride and requested that attendees at Pride completed the survey. In total 16 out of 32 local authority areas were represented in this survey.

