

August 2021

## Transforming the Career Prospects of LGBTQ+ Teachers: A Programme to Help Them Secure School Leadership Roles

### Guidance and Recommendations

Professor Catherine Lee, Deputy Dean for Education Anglia Ruskin University

#### About this briefing

This briefing provides an overview of findings from research led by Professor Catherine Lee that investigates the experiences of Lesbian, Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ+) teachers and school leaders in schools in the UK. The most recent publication in this project is Lee, C. (2020): How does Openness about Personal, Sexual and Gender Identities Influence Teacher Leaders' Self-Perceptions of Authenticity, published in the 'Educational Management Administration and Leadership Journal'. The research reports are listed in the references section below providing more detail on the programme and associated research

This particular policy briefing focuses on transforming the career prospects of LGBTQ+ teachers. It presents recommendations for how policy makers and practitioners, at institutional, local, national and international levels, can work towards making schools a more inclusive space for these teachers.

#### Background

There are an estimated 50,000 LGBTQ+ teachers in UK schools, but few openly LGBTQ+ Headteachers or Senior Leaders. Despite recent advances in equalities legislation, research by Lee shows that many LGBTQ+ teachers do not yet feel safe or adequately protected in their school workplaces and this inhibits their career development. The evidence suggests that schools are particularly challenging environments for LGBTQ+ teachers and LGBTQ+ teacher leaders as the general climate, particularly in rural school communities, is less tolerant of LGBTQ+ identities, leading to LGBTQ+ oppression and discrimination.

#### Why is this an important issue?

- Many LGBTQ+ teachers do not yet feel safe or adequately protected in their school workplaces.
- The homophobic, heteronormative and safety issues that face LGBTQ+ teachers in schools have significant impact on their health, well-being, and identity.
- By collecting more data relevant to this group, LGBTQ+ teacher identities can be acknowledged, understood and performed without fear.
- Schools can promote inclusion, celebrate diversity, accept difference, challenge the status quo and achieve social justice of LGBTQ+ teachers and school leaders.
- More inclusive policies can contribute to improve the satisfaction and retention of LGBTQ+ teachers, particularly in rural areas.

Lee's body of work aims to change this trend by looking at the way in which LGBTQ+ teachers experience their school communities as well as the initiatives designed to promote inclusion, celebrate diversity, accept difference, and achieve social justice for LGBTQ+ teachers.

The studies have been qualitative in nature, with data collected through survey and interviews with LGBTQ+ teachers and school leaders across a variety of schools, as well as document review. The recommendations overleaf are based on the views and experiences of LGBTQ+ teachers, analysis of school and national policies, discussions with a number of aspiring teacher leaders. and a partnership with the Department for Education Diversity and Leadership teams.

#### Contact the research team

We would love to hear feedback on this briefing and invite discussions with policy makers and practitioners in schools and organisations who are using the recommendations or who are interested in doing so.

Professor Catherine Lee:  
Email: [catherine.lee@aru.ac.uk](mailto:catherine.lee@aru.ac.uk)  
Twitter: @DrCatherineLee

This Briefing Paper was developed by Dr. Samson M. Tsegay, Research Facilitator, Anglia Ruskin University, in consultation with HE stakeholders.

## Recommendations for transforming the career prospects of LGBTQ+ teachers

Lee's research has generated recommendations for national bodies (such as the Department for Education) and schools. Overall, all teachers must be empowered to challenge heteronormative school practices; encourage critical reflection; promote the importance of diverse role models for young people in schools, and help LGBTQ+ teachers to reconcile and celebrate their personal and professional identities.

### For national bodies:

- The Department for Education, research funders and other national bodies/partners should promote research about LGBTQ+ teachers and school leaders to better understand their needs.
- The Department for Education should encourage schools to be more inclusive for LGBTQ+ teachers through training and research dissemination.
- Research in this area should be widely disseminated to schools and communities on a regular basis to raise and challenge stereotyped views of this group.
- LGBTQ+ leadership programmes should be funded and developed more widely to improve the diversity of teacher leaders, challenge heteronormative conceptualisations of school leadership, and facilitate school cultures which enable LGBTQ+ teachers to be their authentic selves and flourish within the profession.

### For schools:

- Schools should create safe and inclusive workplaces for LGBTQ+ teachers through acknowledging and respecting diversity, promoting inclusion, and challenging social injustice, oppression, and homophobia. Heterosexual and Cis-gendered teachers should be encouraged to be allies to LGBTQ+ teachers
- Schools should create a welcoming school environment for all LGBTQ+ members of the school community. Use posters to celebrate LGBT diversity and recognise LGBTQ+ family milestones such as marriage and childbirth in the same way that heterosexual and cis staff milestones are acknowledged.

- Schools should incorporate LGBTQ+ issues and themes into the entire school curriculum all the time, not just in LGBT History Month. Schools should motivate LGBTQ+ teachers and school leaders to become visible within their schools. They should be given the opportunity to speak their personal identity into existence in the school workplace.
- Schools should promote the provision of wellbeing services to support LGBTQ+ teachers who experience low self-worth, depression and anxiety due to homophobic and heteronormative discursive practices.
- Schools should review their organisational culture affecting LGBTQ+ teachers. The review and any resulting changes should be done in consultation with LGBTQ+ teachers. LGBTQ+ inclusion policies should be visited regularly and owned by every member of the school community.
- Schools could facilitate LGBTQ+ teachers to establish their own support groups, to solve problems together, network, share new opportunities and provide for each other a vital sense of support.
- Schools should adopt an inclusive recruitment and staff promotion strategy recognising the positive impact that diverse role models have on all children and young people.
- Schools should insist on the inclusion of gender pronouns in all staff email signatures which would foster greater awareness of sexual and gender identities.

### References:

This policy briefing draws on the following reports and journal articles:

Lee, C. (2017) Heteronormativity in a Rural School Community: An Autoethnography, Sense Publications, Rotterdam, New York.

Lee, C. (2019) Fifteen Years on: The Legacy of Section 28 for LGBTQ+ teachers in English Schools, Sex Education, 8 (1), pp.1-16.

Lee, C. (2019) How do Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Teachers Experience UK Rural School Communities? Social Sciences, 8(9), pp.249-258.

Lee, C. (2019) Courageous Leaders: Promoting and Supporting Diversity in School Leadership, Management in Education, 34(1), pp.5-15.

Lee C. (2020) Courage in the Classroom: LGBT Teachers Share their Stories. John Catt Publications Suffolk, UK.

Lee, C. (2020) How does Openness about Personal, Sexual and Gender Identities Influence Teacher Leaders' Self-Perceptions of Authenticity? Educational Management Administration and Leadership, pp.1-23.