

Gender, Sexual Diversity and Professional Practice Learning: Promoting the Equality of University Students

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Abstract : Background: Significant developments in the protection of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) rights culminated in their inclusion in the Equality Act 2010. This provides legal protection against discrimination including the Public Sector Equality Duty requiring public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work. In the UK, whilst the Higher Education sector has made some commitment to eliminating discrimination and addressing LGBTQ inclusivity, there are two particular problems specifically affecting students on professional programmes: -All students will come into contact with LGBTQ patients/clients/students and need to be equipped to respond appropriately to their diverse needs but evidence suggests that this is not always the case. -Many LGBTQ students have specific concerns on professional placements; often 'going back in the closet' or feeling uncertain how to respond to questions about their personal lives and being reticent to challenge discrimination against LGBTQ patients/clients/students for fear of reprisal. Study aim: To investigate how best to prepare all students to deal with the issue of gender and sexual diversity and to support LGBTQ students in negotiating (non) disclosure in practice placements. Methods: This multi-method study was conducted in 2017 in the UK. It comprised a student survey, focus group interview with students and a national benchmarking exercise. Findings: Preliminary findings are that there is considerable variation across professional programmes regarding the preparation of students to respond to LGBTQ issues. Similarly, there is considerable difference between the level of preparedness experienced by students irrespective of whether they identify as LGBTQ. Discussion: Nationally there are a number of 'best practice' examples that we share in this presentation. These contain important details and guidance about how to better prepare university students for professional practice, and to contribute to eliminating discrimination and addressing LGBTQ inclusivity. Conclusions: The presentation will appeal to delegates who are interested in the equality agenda regarding LGBTQ people. The study findings will be discussed and debated to explore their impact on higher education and learning and to identify ways to integrate best practice into professional curricula across the UK and beyond.

Keywords : diversity, equality, practice, sexuality, students, university

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