

Welcoming LGBTIQ+ users: advice for public library workers

Book 28 Library

In association with Colette Townend, Dr Elizabeth L. Chapman
and Isadore Auerbach George

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Introduction

Who are Book 28 Library?

Book 28 represents a group of library workers, researchers and LGBTIQ+ people who want to see public libraries offering better service for queer users.

We also run our own library of LGBTIQ+ literature, currently housed at the Outside Project LGBTIQ+ Community Centre in Borough, London; and we campaign against library cuts and closures in the UK, which we believe disproportionately impact LGBTIQ+ library users.

How to use this guide:

This guide has been written in collaboration with librarians and library researchers who have a special interest in service for LGBTIQ+ people. This guide is for all levels of library staff, recommendations for implementation by management, but also tips that will be relevant for frontline library work and interactions. We believe most library workers want everyone to feel welcome in their library, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity. Yet tackling issues in LGBTIQ+ library service can feel complicated and intimidating, especially if you are not already aware of common barriers.

Our goal is to provide you with some easy-to-implement tips and tricks, which we believe would improve the experience of

many LGBTIQ+ library users. We have aimed to include things you could do even if you are not senior within your library service.

The advice we offer may be relevant to library workers throughout the UK and beyond. However, it will be particularly relevant to those in England and Scotland. Those in Wales and Northern Ireland may be able to take advantage of policies and schemes such as Libraries NI's Equality Scheme for Libraries NI, or the Welsh government's 'LGBTQ+ Language and History' workshops for workers in Welsh museums, archives and libraries. We hope that we can still provide useful tips for day-to-day situations that may push beyond the resources offered locally.

We also recognise that every library is different, and that not all these tips will work for everyone. Our biggest piece of advice is to **build relationships with your own local LGBTIQ+ community**, and find out what works for *them*. This guide is not meant to act as a prescriptive set of rules that comprise the only way to serve LGBTIQ+ patrons; nor is it legal advice. Rather, it holds what we hope are good ideas of what to address if you're not sure where to start.

LGBTIQ+: key info

Terminology can feel like a fraught area, as not everyone agrees on definitions or terms. However, the most important thing to remember is that you should respect the words someone uses for themselves, and how they define them.

Throughout this guide, we describe our target group with the term 'LGBTIQ+', which stands for...

- **Lesbian:** women who are attracted to and date other women, exclusively
- **Gay:** primarily men who are attracted to and date other men, exclusively; may also be used interchangeably with 'lesbian', or as a 'general' term (see 'queer')
- **Bisexual or 'bi':** attracted to more than one gender. We use the concept of the 'bisexual umbrella', which includes all people who experience multi-gender attraction, such as pansexual people
- **Transgender or 'trans':** someone whose gender is not the same as the one they were assigned at birth. For example, a woman who was assigned male at birth would be transgender woman.

The word 'non-binary' refers to someone whose identity falls outside of 'man' or 'woman', which would also fall under this definition of 'transgender'/'trans'. The opposite of transgender is cisgender.

- **Intersex:** someone whose biological characteristics are not easily categorised as 'male' / 'female'. For example, their reproductive anatomy might look ambiguous, or they might have hormone patterns that are not 'expected' for their assigned sex.

N.b. This is now the preferred term instead of 'hermaphrodite', which is usually found offensive. You may also hear 'DSDs', or '[Differences in sex development](#)'. Some intersex people or people with DSDs do not consider themselves LGBT in any way, and may prefer to be grouped separately. Please reach out to your local community to understand their preferences.

- **Queer:** someone who is not 'straight', i.e. exclusively attracted to the 'opposite' gender, especially someone who feels that other terms don't properly describe them. Can also be used as a 'general' term, to describe all people who aren't cisgender and heterosexual.

N.b. As 'queer' is both historically and currently used as a slur, many people find its use offensive, or believe only LGBTIQ+ people can/should use it. If you are not confident or clear using it, we would advise against it, especially when labelling other people.

- **Plus:** there are many other terms that are often included with LGBTIQ+ people, including (but not exclusively) asexual (people who experience no or minimal sexual attraction to other people) and aromantic (people who experience no or minimal romantic attraction to other people).

These are the definitions we use in this guide, which we believe reflect the common understandings of these terms as you are likely to encounter them. For up-to-date information on LGBTIQ+ terminology, we recommend:

- [PFLAG National Glossary of Terms](#)
- [Stonewall's Glossary of Terms](#)

Customer Service

LGBTIQ+ people's comfort in your library space can be shaped by the interactions they have with your staff or volunteers, from greetings when they come into the library, to the equalities monitoring options on the sign-up forms.

We recommend that staff are encouraged to **avoid assumptions**, such as:

- Assuming you know someone's gender, especially if they are overtly gender nonconforming. If you're unsure of someone's gender, use neutral terms like 'person' instead of 'man'/'woman' and the singular third-person pronoun¹ 'they' instead of 'he'/'she'. Avoid the phrases 'Ladies and gentlemen' and 'Boys and girls'. Avoid using 'ma'am' or 'sir' when addressing patrons, communicate politeness by skipping the title and using a simple 'excuse me'.
- Assuming you know what people's relationships are to one another. Rather than 'sister', 'husband', 'wife', etc., try using phrases such as 'the person you came in with' if you don't know what someone's relationship is. This may also make other people more comfortable: spouses of disabled persons always assumed to be 'carers'; parents of biracial or adopted children assumed to be 'nannies'; etc.

¹ Pronouns are the words we use to refer to someone instead of their name, such as 'he', 'she' or 'they'.

Staff / volunteer Training

When looking at staff or volunteer training, we suggest that two key principles should underpin your ethos:

1. Support for LGBTIQ+ people should not be considered an optional issue, governed by individual opinion, but rather an **essential part of delivering your library service.**

This includes making sure your service meets your obligations under legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, which states (amongst other things) that you should aim to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not, when providing a service as a public authority. These characteristics include sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

2. Support for LGBTIQ+ people is **not simply an absence of intentional malice towards them.**

Even well-meaning staff and volunteers might unintentionally make LGBTIQ+ people feel less welcome when using your service. For example, a lesbian woman who attends a baby rhyme time event only to be told to 'bring her husband next time' might feel concerned her wife wouldn't be welcome, even if that's not the case.

Further, preferred reading material might be affected by a protected characteristic: a trans person might be more

interested in reading about other trans people, compared to the average cisgender person. If there happen to be no books about trans people in your library, some trans people will conclude their needs have not been thought of and they're not welcome, even if you would never actually ban such books.

As such, all staff and volunteers should be provided with information and training to identify unintentional bias and look for ways to proactively cater for LGBTIQ+ people as part of your community of users. They should be aware of all legislative obligations that affect service delivery, including regarding protected characteristics, and common scenarios which may might present barriers in public libraries (e.g. issues around single-sex toilets, what titles staff use when addressing visitors, how 'family' events are marketed - see [Gendered groups and facilities](#)).

We recommend that you ask prospective staff and volunteers about their knowledge of sexuality and gender issues at the interview stage. This allows you to provide information that addresses the gaps in their knowledge before they begin working unsupervised with the public. Prejudice should be tackled at this early stage.

Human-led training (with a chance to ask and answer questions) from CPD-accredited organisations can enormously help staff with their confidence around this issue. Ideally, such training would happen multiple times over a worker's time within a library service as new issues come up and norms continue to evolve and change.

You may work for a library service that does offer or even mandate some training on equality-related legislation, such as Libraries NI's commitment to training staff in Section 75(1). In these cases, we recommend ensuring that you know what training you are entitled to; that you and your colleagues have received it; and that you have the chance to feed back to such training.

If you feel that such training has been very useful to you, we encourage you to feed back this positive experience and to emphasise the value such training has had. Any library workers in the UK that have experience of public library training on LGBTIQ+ issues that has been useful, please feel free to share it with Book 28 for possible inclusion in future issues of this guide.

To supplement training courses, we recommend that staff at least be provided with access to CPD materials such as books and websites about serving LGBTIQ+ people. CILIP LGBTQ+ Network hosts a number of useful resources on their [webpage](#), including Binni Brynholf's '[Padlet](#)' which is regularly updated with useful links. We recommend sharing this guide itself with all your staff.

Some titles for further reading include...

- *LGBT People and the UK Cultural Sector* (Vincent, 2014)

- *LGBTQ+ Librarianship in the 21st Century: Emerging Directions of Advocacy and Community Engagement in Diverse Information Environments* (Mehra, 2019)
- *Queer Library Alliance: Global Reflections and Imaginings* (Montague and McKeever, 2017)
- *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users: Essays on Outreach, Service, Collections and Access* (Greenblat, 2010)
- *Supporting Trans People in Libraries* (Krueger, 2019)
- *Supporting Trans People of Colour: How to Make Your Practice Inclusive* (Sabah Choudrey, 2021)

When to ask

People are often unsure about when or how to ask questions about LGBTIQ+ people: what their relationships are, which pronouns to use, etc. We would suggest first considering whether it's necessary to know. For example, if someone has come in to make some photocopies and then leave again, do you really need to know their gender? Or whether that woman is their wife or their sister? Get comfortable with not knowing and avoid asking only out of curiosity.

However, if it is going to be coming up - e.g. they have joined a book group and you're expecting to see them monthly - people won't normally mind if you ask them discreetly and politely. A

simple, 'Do you mind if I ask what pronouns I should use for you during this book club' is unlikely to offend most trans people so long as it is asked discreetly and in private. We recommend *against* telling everyone they *have to* share pronouns in front of each other. This is because some trans people may use more than one set depending on how safe they feel, demanding they share upfront can put them into an uncomfortable position.

If you feel comfortable, build sharing your own pronouns into normal practice. This is a great way to signal to people you are aware of and supportive of trans and gender nonconforming people and won't be making assumptions. This also means that no-one will feel 'singled out' if asked about theirs. This could look like wearing a pronoun badge (e.g. 'he/him') in the library, adding your pronouns to your library email signature or your screen name on a video conferencing software, or offering your pronouns when you introduce yourself during groups (whilst not demanding that others do so).

If you do choose to do this, be prepared for people not to know what pronouns are, or why you would wear a badge or share them in your email, and have your explanation ready. This includes colleagues, who you might want to encourage to do the same thing after explaining why you're doing it yourself.

Gendered groups and facilities

Gendered groups and facilities can cause anxiety for many trans and queer people. Trans people have the right to join groups and use facilities according to the gender they identify

with, unless you can prove that there is a reason why excluding them is a proportionate measure to achieve a legitimate aim (a situation unlikely to occur in a public library setting; legal advice should be sought if you are unsure).

Trans people should be welcomed by staff to gendered events, e.g. a reading group aimed at female refugees should welcome trans women who are refugees. Make sure that all staff involved in any such events are aware of their responsibilities according to the Equality Act 2010, and are prepared to defend and support trans people's rights to such spaces. The fact that you are aware of and prepared to include trans people in any gendered groups or events can be signalled on marketing material, e.g. a footnote with copy that reads something along the lines of, 'welcome to all who feel a women's group is for them', or even a simple 'trans women welcome'.

Consider what you are trying to achieve when gendering a group or event and reflect this in your marketing material. For example, if a group is for women and you will be speaking prominently about womanhood, it may be inappropriate to market it for 'women and non-binary people' as many non-binary people are *not* women. If you are making a group for new mothers on the assumption that they would be the primary caregivers of infants, consider instead marketing it to young parents who need support, rather than gendering the group unnecessarily.

Gendered toilets are an especially important issue as library toilets may be the only free public facilities in a given area.

Many homeless people rely on them (a disproportionate amount of whom are LGBTIQ+ - according to The Albert Kennedy Trust up to a quarter of the youth homeless population in the UK is LGBTIQ+). There are no British laws barring trans people from using whichever toilet they feel most comfortable in, regardless of which medical procedures they may have undertaken, or what gender is on their documents (Stonewall, 2017). If your toilets are clearly marked, then it is fair to assume someone has knowingly gone into the toilet they intended to use, and there is no need to challenge them! Any inappropriate conduct in public toilets is its own issue and should be dealt with using your existing policies on behaviour such as harassment, if and only if it arises.

You can also go a step further and consider either adding a gender neutral toilet to your establishment (if your library is undergoing refurbishment or moving to a new site), or gender neutralising a toilet you already have. For example, if you have two identical toilets that are each self-contained, single-toilet rooms marked 'men' and 'women', changing their signs to say 'toilet' may alleviate anxiety for many LGBTIQ+ people.

Others may also benefit from gender neutral toilets, such as: parents of different genders to their young children; people accompanied to the toilet by a carer of a different gender; or cisgender people who are gender nonconforming, e.g. women who adopt more 'masculine' clothing and hairstyles, who may also feel anxious about being challenged in gendered toilets.

General Privacy

Library users expect (and legally have the right to!) privacy and professionalism from staff over matters such as their reading choices, information requests or Internet use. This is no less important for LGBTIQ+ people, who in fact might require extra discretion. For example, if someone comes to the library alone to request information on being transgender, then returns later with a companion, they may not want you to mention what they asked about during their last visit. Similarly, if someone has disclosed their gender identity, sexuality or relationship status in one setting, such as a book club, we caution against sharing or gossiping about this even to other staff.

Consider discretion in other areas. Whilst it is great to include proudly LGBTIQ+-supportive displays and areas, these should not be the only options for accessing information. Are some stock or pamphlets shelved away from the main entrance of the library? Do users have the option to use self-checkouts to scan out their books? If they do come to the desk to check out obviously queer literature, they may not welcome comments from the desk staff about their choices, even neutral-seeming ones such as 'This looks like an interesting read'.

Internet privacy and use is also important. Unfortunately, many Internet filtering softwares used in public libraries automatically 'blacklist' any LGBTIQ+ terminology such as 'lesbian' on the assumption that all related content must be sexual. As well as being offensive this also stops people from getting key information they may need. Although we may think of library

Internet use as highly public, for someone who lives in an intolerant household using a library computer may be the only 'private' option they have to reach out for information.

Review any Internet filtering software in place and see whether it allows searches on a range of LGBTIQ+ terminology. The best software also allows users to request access to a blocked website that can be quickly granted at the discretion of a library manager, allowing any over-zealous blocking to be corrected immediately.

We recommend the following website to be whitelisted on all library computers (including those accessed by young people), at a minimum:

<https://www.akt.org.uk/> - the Albert Kennedy Trust, an LGBTIQ+ youth homelessness charity

<https://bicomcommunitynews.co.uk/local-groups/> - Bi Community News, an online and hard copy bi news magazine; this page lists local bi groups around the country, as well as other national bi organisations

<https://galop.org.uk/> - GALOP, a charity offering support for LGBTIQ+ people who have experienced abuse or violence

<https://genderedintelligence.co.uk/> - Gendered Intelligence, a registered charity that exists to increase understanding of gender diversity and improve trans lives

<https://www.gires.org.uk/> - GIRES, the Gender Identity Research and Education Society

<https://hidayahlgbt.com/> - Hidayah, one of the UK's queer Muslim charities

<https://www.houseofrainbow.org/> - House of Rainbow, an advocacy group for LGBTIQ+ people of faith, particularly those with an African or Caribbean connection

<https://www.lgbttravellerpride.com/> - Traveller Pride, a collective made up of LGBTIQ+ Travellers working to provide support, representation and a platform for LGBTIQ+ Travellers

<https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/> - Mermaids, a charity supporting trans and gender-diverse young people

<https://oiiuk.org/> - The Organisation Intersex International's UK branch

<https://www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk> Opening Doors: a national charity providing support to LGBTIQ+ people aged 50+

<https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/> - Rainbow Railroad, a not-for-profit organisation that helps LGBTIQ+ people leave places of persecution and travel to safety

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/> - Stonewall, a general LGBTIQ+ support and information charity

<https://switchboard.lgbt/> - Switchboard, a phone line and Internet chat offering help and support for LGBTIQ+ or questioning people

<https://www.theproudtrust.org> - The Proud Trust, a website showcasing resources for LGBTIQ+ youth

<https://www.ukblackpride.org.uk/> - UK Black Pride, which hosts an annual celebration for LGBTIQ+ people of African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American and Middle Eastern descent

You may even want to actively signpost to these websites. If you share useful links for community information on your own library website, include these as well.

Children's Privacy

Children also have the right to privacy (ICO, 2018). Consider what structures are in place to allow your underage users to exercise their right to information and privacy by borrowing books without a parents' help. Does their library card restrict them to the children's section until a certain age? If so, do you provide age-appropriate information on all the same sensitive topics in your children's collection as you would find in your adult one? For example, would a child be able to borrow books on sensitive issues ranging from sexuality to substance abuse

themselves, or would they need to rely on an adult borrowing one from the adult section for them?

The latest UK GDPR legislation protects a level of privacy for the borrowing data of young people, especially your users 13 or over (this is over 12 in Scotland). Therefore you should avoid telling parents what their teenage users are borrowing or have these accounts linked so they can be viewed. However, under 18s cannot go into a contractual agreement, so therefore most libraries ask for a parent/carer guarantor.

Legally, the guarantor can ask for the details of books that are overdue or missing with charges owing to the library. We recommend that senior staff consider these different factors, including rights to privacy and any legal advice, and set a clear policy in advance, e.g. that loans to children under 13 can be co-managed with an adult but become the private record after this age, except by special arrangement.

Any genuine concerns for the wellbeing of children in the library can and should be raised through the appropriate safeguarding mechanisms. Below this threshold, staff should ensure they do not indulge in discussing LGBTIQ+ book choices with that child's parents or caregivers, or disclosing their borrowing records. As well as contravening that child's right to privacy, this can also be a safeguarding risk in and of itself: one of the most common reasons cited by homeless LGBTIQ+ young people in becoming homeless in the first place is non-acceptance from family members, sometimes including outright abuse.

We recommend above all that frontline volunteers and staff exercise caution and 'double-check' with senior management before disclosing LGBTIQ+ loans to caregivers, if they are ever unsure of what is appropriate or legally required. The need for discretion, nuance and professionalism in these decisions is one of the reasons that Book 28 Library has anecdotally found that public libraries run by small groups of professional, longer-term staff are better at safeguarding LGBTIQ+ users than those run by high-volume, high-turnover volunteer teams.

Membership

Sign-up

A starting place for membership sign up is to consider what you really **need**, and **why** you need it.

This reflects a key principle of the UK GDPR: 'Data Minimisation'. You should limit the amount of data that you collect on your patrons, especially sensitive data. With this in mind, do you really need to collect information such as a patron's title? For other types of sensitive information, such as gender, you might consider the ethics and reach the decision that it is still important to collect in order to ensure you are delivering an equitable service.

Local authorities can collect equalities information to monitor that they are reaching people with protected characteristics. Collecting this data can also be useful for equalities impact assessments. Libraries at risk of cuts or closure may need to have an equalities impact assessment to analyse if a closure disproportionately affects a particular minority group, such as LGBTIQ+ people. Finally, this can be important to argue that you are/aren't reaching particular groups, e.g. boys under 16.

Yet it is worth bearing in mind that even if you have tried to collect this data, it may be an underrepresentation. Your LMS may not be completely accurate in representing gender (as users may have changed gender since the point they

registered), trans status (if your LMS does not record this) or sexuality (because people are even less likely to disclose).

Holding such personal information can be an issue for protecting privacy: just having data can be a risk. Other council departments may have the right to use your data, you may face a hack and this sensitive information be available to hackers. If your library service is run by a trust, private company, or uses volunteers, think about who gets to look at library records. Members of your staff may also maliciously use this information.

Thus it is important to distinguish between key information that is needed to provide functional library access - e.g. a name and a form of contact - and equalities monitoring data, such as sexuality and gender, which should be optional. For example, many library sign-up forms list 'sexuality' under optional equalities monitoring, but 'gender' as a mandatory field in key information, despite there being no apparent reason why disclosing this would be functionally relevant to using the library.

Finally, consider what a child needs in order to sign up to your library. For LGBTIQ+ children and young people, being able to use the library for information and representation can be a lifeline, especially if they do not have accepting parents. What information do children need to provide to sign up? Do they need a parent's signature, or even a parent present? For many children (such as those whose parents do not speak English, are frequently absent or do not have documentation such as proof of address) such requirements can be prohibitive.

How do you ask?

Many LGBTIQ+ people do not feel that their identities fit into fixed tick box categories. The limitations of tick boxes and dropdowns mean every option just may not be possible on a simple form. Ideally, asking any question about identity should be a free text box (so that the user can write in their own terms, however they would best describe themselves). However, for gathering statistics this is hard to get right. Overall, we advise you to give people a maximum amount of free expression, while still allowing for useful data grouping and any limitations in data entry. Our ranking of best practice for answering gender/sexuality is as follows: free text; some closed (checkbox) with free text option; closed (checkbox) options. Throughout, make it clear what sections are optional.

As for which options you include, please see the next section on [Library Management System configuration](#).

Library Management System configuration

Your library management system will have defaults for gender and sexuality. These may be poor (as seen in research by E.R. Davis, 2019) so you will need to review them, make a good decision or perhaps even consult your community for what options they would like to see.

- **Title:** Do you need this? Some LMS will have this as a default that you cannot remove. If you do, make sure you include Mx (gender neutral) but also an option if a user

does not want a title. Also, do not assume gender from title: if a library user has given their title as 'Mr' but has opted not to select a 'gender' option, do not assume that they are male.

- **Gender:** You need genders other than only male/female, your LMS may be set up with minimal options so do check this. Ideally you would have a free text box you could potentially group. However your LMS may be set up for options only. Options for male/female are technically less desirable as these denote sex rather than gender, however this is tricky for the limitations of a LMS which may not turn 'boy' into 'man' at the age of 18. Therefore we recommend at minimum: Female, Male, Non-Binary, Other, Prefer not to say. If you can add more options than that we applaud you.
- **Trans status:** Does your LMS have an option for this? We recommend the question 'Are you trans?' yes/no/prefer not to say. Preferably with an info link explaining what trans means for anyone uncertain.*
- **Sexuality:** We recommend 'gay', 'lesbian/gay woman', 'heterosexual/straight', 'bisexual', 'queer', 'asexual', 'other' and 'prefer not to say' as a minimum list of options. If you can add more or have an open text box that can be grouped, that is ideal. Preferably, it is good to let people tick more than one: some people may consider themselves both asexual and gay (if they are romantically attracted to the same gender, but don't experience sexual attraction).

However, many Library Management Systems cannot accommodate this, so you may have to ask people to 'select the term that describes you best'; in this case, it is even more important to offer a free text / 'other' option where possible.

*It is best to have this as a separate piece of data; however, if this is not possible, you may want to consider giving triplicate gender options such as 'woman', 'trans woman' and 'cis woman'. This still allows people to disclose gender separately from trans status (by choosing the first option), but the other options also give a way of possibly collecting this data if you cannot collect it separately.

Make sure your online catalogue (OPAC) and paper forms replicate these options exactly, otherwise frontline staff will find it difficult to translate the information accurately without asking further potentially intrusive questions.

Be aware that many will find these questions personal and may not disclose or may change their outlooks in their lifetime so your data will not always be accurate. You should publicly advertise a confidential method for users to change this information. For trans people, changing their gender on their membership information can be incredibly important so that your staff address them correctly.

Separate to membership, you may collect feedback from events. Consider if you want to include this, it can be good for programmes like LGBT+ History Month to pick up whether you

are meeting the needs of your membership across the spectrum.

Finally, if you find the options offered by your LMS, or even council databases, are needlessly restricted in this area - tell them and suggest changes!

Identification/documentation

For LGBTIQ+ people, producing 'legal' documentation can often be a significant barrier to participating in public life. This can be for a number of reasons, such as names not matching the ones they are currently using, or because homelessness or refugee status may have made it hard for them to get 'proper' documentation.

We recommend making as much of your library accessible without any ID as possible: computer terminals where a basic browser can be used without any login, 'light' borrower memberships that allow some borrowing without any ID and free use of digital resources. We strongly recommend *against* 'Library Plus' models of opening that require an ID-based library card to even gain access to the library, as this can be highly exclusionary to the most vulnerable users.

If management determines that some form of ID is necessary, explicitly allow people (regardless of whether or not they are trans!) to give any first name for their library account, e.g. if they prefer a shortened form or a different name altogether. Suggest perhaps only the surname needs to match the ID. If you are

required by management to note the name on their ID in your LMS, many LMSs now include a field for 'preferred first name' in addition to the one on the ID. Make sure your system is configured so that this field is what will be used for things like automatic communications.

Many in public libraries have realised that asking for proof of address in addition to ID is not sufficiently effective in decreasing abuse of library services to justify the exclusion this can cause. For example, Islington Libraries have functioned without the need for proof of address for several years now. As billing has increasingly become paperless, fewer people have proof of address. It is worth bearing in mind that even where this is claimed to be necessary for 'security' reasons, proof of address is very easy to fake especially to the standard of checking done by frontline library staff, who are unlikely to be using RFID-scanners and other such documentation validation!

We encourage you to actively work with management and legal teams to decrease the amount of barriers for library membership. However, if you currently are still required to ask for proof of address, ensure that you accept confirmation of residence at local hostels, day centres, etc., and that you actively signpost that you will accept such forms of documentation.

Cataloguing and Metadata

Classification

Do your nonfiction books arrive pre-classified and ready-for shelf? If so you will likely have NAG guidelines or similar set up with your supplier, which will also limit the Dewey Decimal Classification system (DDC) to only a few decimal places. Remember that you can change the classification of a book after arriving, and reassign it a local classification. For example, if you notice that many of your books about trans people arrive with a '600s' number in the 'medicine' section, biography or social sciences may be better locations for some works.

Remember that the general public may have little to no knowledge of DDC and other classification systems. As part of signposting to LGBTIQ+ books, you may want posters/leaflets available that list the 'numbers to look for book spines' that indicate LGBTIQ+ topics (such as 306.768). You may want to include additional shelf-signage in these (and other) areas, such as 'Social sciences', 'Groups of people', 'Culture' or even more specific down to 'LGBTIQ+ issues' as this will help people find desired sections when browsing the shelves without having to ask for help from library staff.

Here are some examples of DDC numbers where you may find LGBTIQ+ titles:

306.76 Sexual orientation, transgender and intersex people
- further defined

306.76 Asexuality (as above, but asexuality titles are at this

second decimal level also)
306.764 Heterosexuality
306.765 Bisexuality
306.766 Homosexuality (inc. gay liberation and
homophobia)
306.7662 Gay men
306.7663 Lesbians
306.768 Transgender and intersex people
306.7685 Intersex people
306.775 S&M
306.778 Transvestites and cross-dressing
306.848 Same sex marriage
792.028 Drag and male/female impersonation
920 Biographies

Dewey can add these subdivisions together, eg. 306.7663092 can be the dewey number of a lesbian biography. However public libraries often use the limits on DDC decimal points (on account of their more 'general' collections and audience), ending at just '306.766' for many titles so that interfiling may have less detail. A large trans collection could leave you with a row of books at 306.768 (as limited to 3 decimal places), which is broad for all books of various subjects you may have about transgender people. You could add more decimal places or come up with new ways of organising other than DDC which work better for the plethora of transgender experiences!

Search & retrieval

Searching for LGBTIQ+ books on your OPAC may be one of the most discreet options available for library users seeking this information; it is therefore essential that their efforts are met with resources that have high relevance to their search needs. As noted [above](#), there is a plurality of terminology associated with the LGBTIQ+ community. In light of this, sometimes more is more: tags and note fields can allow you to add more than one term to a resource, e.g. both 'bisexual' and 'pansexual' where appropriate.

Some LMSs will allow hierarchical metadata, such as taxonomies, so that terms for individual sexualities can be linked to broader terms such as 'LGBTIQ+' with a superimposing relationship, allowing an entry point to the resource with someone who searches either the broader or narrower term (see [Subject Headings](#) below).

Borrowbox and other e-loan providers will limit the tagging you can do on their platforms, but if you have these e-resources as MARC records uploaded onto your LMS and therefore viewable on your OPAC, the MARC records will use subject headings which you can also add to. Discovery can therefore be limited on the Libby/Borrowbox platforms but you have the opportunity to customise this on your own LMS catalogue.

Such issues with discovery can be offset by providing signposting on the landing page of both your overall OPAC and any e-resources. For example, putting together an 'LGBTIQ+

collection' on your homepages can be a good way to showcase these resources without the need for people to search for them, especially doing seasonal events such as LGBT+ History Month or Pride. On your OPAC's homepage, you can signpost specific tags / headings that you are using for LGBTIQ+ resources, along with any other information to help users in catalogue searching.

Subject headings

Your catalogue records will likely use Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) to tag subjects to your titles. Depending on your LMS configuration, Subject Headings may be viewable to only staff or the public also, either way they will get search results using these terms. These run the risk of using outdated terms if a book in your collection is old, or even a new book where you import an old record from a metadata supplier. Current LCSH aren't all-encompassing or representative enough for LGBTIQ+ people and their needs.

For example: 'Homosexuality' is still used as a subject heading for gay life (there is no 'Heterosexuality' for works on straight people!); "Gays" is used for gay men; and *Trumpet* by Jackie Kay (a book that pre-dates current language about transgender people but quite clearly has a central character we would now fall under the 'trans' umbrella) was found in one contributor's catalogue with the subject heading "tranvestites". Do not be afraid to edit a catalogue record to remove or change a word, or ask your cataloguing team to if under their responsibility. We recommend [Homosaurus](#) for using additional controlled

vocabulary to records with search terms that will be used by members of the LGBTIQ+ community. We also recommend using natural-language terms where possible (e.g. the adjective 'bisexual' rather than abstract and plural nouns such as 'bisexuals' or 'bisexuality'), as members of the general public are more likely to enter these terms.

However, bear in mind that while words might be considered outdated or even offensive to some, they may also be the only known term to some library users who genuinely wish to retrieve information. Therefore consider whether you can retain these terms in a searchable field, or as an associated term, but in such a way that they are not visible on the OPAC (e.g. as a subject heading viewable only to staff but which will still allow result retrieval). Depending on the level of control your LMS allows you, you may even be able to programme search protocols such as 'for searches of X term, return resources with Y term in metadata'.

Overall, metadata and cataloguing can be one of the most important areas to address if you wish to improve LGBTIQ+ users' impressions of how relevant your library resources are to their needs. In our experience, many may try searching for terms such as 'trans' on your catalogue as part of an initial assessment of how relevant the collection is; and having returned no relevant results, few members of the public will have enough technical knowledge to realise that this does not mean that such resources are not present. They will simply assume you don't have the books.

We also acknowledge that this is one of the most technical areas of library work and many library workers themselves will not feel confident in addressing these issues. This is especially the case given the devastating loss of metadata and cataloguing expert roles in many public library teams, which has been an all-too-common experience with cuts and closures and the move to buying in of metadata from suppliers, which can never fully cover all acquisitions.

We recommend that library workers prioritise improving the catalogue even if they are not confident at first: many less 'technical' solutions can still make useful improvements, such as adding additional tags to a notes field. We also recommend that workers make clear the importance of these skills and ask management for training and resources. CILIP has made 'Information retrieval/search' one of the 'key' strands that they provide professional development on via the UK eInformation Group, and provide training opportunities accordingly. The Cataloguing & Indexing Group of CILIP also post all research openly on their webpage. The British Library also offers a series of 'training courses for cataloguers'.

Collection Development

Ensuring a diverse collection

Sometimes library workers assume that the collection is adequate just because nobody has requested LGBTIQ+ materials or complained about the lack of them. However, LGBTIQ+ people have often been poorly served by libraries, and may simply assume the library has nothing to offer them, or may be uncomfortable coming forward.

The number of LGBTIQ+ titles published by mainstream UK publishing houses is steadily increasing, and as a result, titles are more likely to arrive automatically through your regular library supplier. However, there are some types of stock that may require a little extra effort to seek out. These include:

- Books for younger children (board books, picture books and middle-grade books)
- Books by, for and about people with multiply marginalised identities (e.g. books by Black queer authors)
- Books by, for and about people who are trans and/or non-binary, intersex, asexual, demisexual, Two-Spirit, or other queer identities.

- Books on queer sex and LGBTIQ+-inclusive sexual health
- Books (or other information) on queer parenting options (see also [Information resources](#))
- Books (or other information) on queer health (see also [Information resources](#))
- Materials in accessible formats (e.g. large print, Braille, easy-read - see [Information resources](#))

Many LGBTIQ+ people will feel disappointed with your library service if you claim to represent them, e.g. in an 'LGBT' section, but they cannot find anything specific to their identity; do not assume, for example, that a bisexual man would be just as happy to only read book about exclusively gay men.

To ensure a diverse range of LGBTIQ+ materials, particularly in the areas listed above, you will need to consider international imports and materials from smaller presses. In our section on [Library suppliers and specialist bookshops](#), you can find a list of bookshops that can be used both for buying and for stock ideas; their websites are usually categorised by age, and sometimes also by sexual/gender identity.

Members of the public, whether LGBTIQ+ or not, are not always aware that they can request or suggest items for purchase. This service should be actively promoted, particularly to LGBTIQ+

and other underserved communities, to ensure that community needs are met.

Library size

Your library might be a central, town centre or local branch library, with subsequently varied collection sizes. For the smallest branch or mobile libraries we recommend investment in a minimum of 20-30 specialist, LGBTIQ+-focused titles to start with, making sure adequate distribution is given across your different collections of children, adults, or sections like graphic novels. You can look at our list of [library suppliers](#) and [LGBTIQ+ book awards](#) for lists of suggestions, or bibliographies such as the Library Journal's '[50 Years After Stonewall](#)'. However, this is heavily US-focused. Some key British titles are listed below, with a focus on titles that may not necessarily arrive automatically from your main supplier.

Adult titles:

- ★ *Trans Britain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (Ms Christine Burns, 2018, Unbound). 9781783528448

- ★ *A Little Gay History of Wales* (Daryl Leeworthy, 2019, University of Wales Press). 9781786834805

- ★ *The Queens' English: The LGBTQIA+ Dictionary of Lingo and Colloquial Expressions* (Chloe O. Davis, 2021, Vintage Publishing). 9781529110401

- ★ *Sista!: An anthology of writings by Same Gender Loving Women of African/Caribbean descent with a UK connection* (Phyll Opoku-Gyimah, 2018, Team Angelica Publishing). 9780995516243
- ★ *Black and Gay in the UK: An Anthology* (John R. Gordon and Rikki Beadle-Blair, 2014, Team Angelica Publishing). 9780956971968
- ★ *Sensible Footwear: A Girl's Guide* (Kate Charlesworth, 2019, Myriad Editions). 9780993563348
- ★ *Wain: LGBT Reimaginings of Scottish Folktales* (Rachel Plummer, 2019, The Emma Press). 9781910139479
- ★ *Purple Prose: Bisexuality in Britain* (ed. Kate Harrad, 2016, Thorntree Press). 9780996460163
- ★ *Trans Like Me: A Journey for All of Us* (C.N. Lester, 2017, Virago Press). 9780349008608
- ★ *Bi the Way: The Bisexual Guide to Life* (Lois Shearing, 2021, Jessica Kingsley Publishers). 9781787752900
- ★ *Queer: A Graphic History* (Meg-John Barker and Jules Scheele, 2016, Icon Books). 9781785780714
- ★ *Gender: A Graphic Guide* (Meg-John Barker and Jules Scheele, 2019, Icon Books). 9781785784521

- ★ *Outrageous: The Story of Section 28 and Britain's Battle for LGBT Education* (Paul Baker, 2022, Reaktion Books).
9781789145618

- ★ *How to be Ace: A Memoir of Growing Up Asexual*
(Rebecca Burgess, 2020, Jessica Kingsley Publishers).
9781787752153

- ★ *In Their Shoes: Navigating Non-Binary Life* (Jamie Windust, 2020, Jessica Kingsley Publishers).
9781787752429

- ★ *They/Them/Their: A Guide to Non-binary and Genderqueer Identities* (Eris Young, 2019, Hachette). 9781784508722

- ★ *Now You See Me: Lesbian Life Stories* (edited by Jane Traies, 2018, Tollington Press). 9781909347106

For reasons of space, we have here focused primarily on non-fiction titles. Sheffield Libraries have a regularly-updated collection of 'listchallenges' [here](#), many of which focus on LGBTIQ+ titles. These do not include bibliographic information but are a good source of ideas.

We have noticed recently that UK LGBTIQ+ YA titles now do tend to arrive automatically through mainstream library suppliers (a very welcome improvement compared with just a few years ago!). We have therefore not included YA titles here; however, it is worth looking beyond the UK, as US publishers

still produce a wider range of titles covering a broader range of LGBTIQ+ and multiply marginalised identities. Some useful sources for ideas are linked in the next paragraph.

We have listed some UK children's titles below; many of these may also come through your mainstream suppliers, but as there are relatively few available, we recommend having multiple copies across your library system. However, for children's titles, it is *essential* to look beyond the UK. Useful sources of ideas include our list of [library suppliers](#) and [LGBTIQ+ book awards](#), as well as the Sheffield [listchallenges](#), which also include children's titles.

Children's titles:

- ★ *Nen and the Lonely Fisherman* (Ian Eagleton and James Mayhew, 2021, Owlet Press). 9781913339098
- ★ *Grandad's Camper* (Harry Woodgate, 2021, Andersen Press). 9781783449927
- ★ *The Pirate Mums* (Jodie Lancet-Grant and Lydia Corry, 2021, Oxford University Press). 9780192777799
- ★ *Bathe the Cat* (Alice B. McGinty and David Roberts, 2022, Chronicle Books). 9781452142708
- ★ *My Daddies* (Gareth Peter and Garry Parsons, 2021, Puffin). 9780241405772

- ★ *Forever Star* (Gareth Peter and Judi Abbot, 2021, Puffin). 9780241453025
- ★ *Me, My Dad and the End of the Rainbow* (Benjamin Dean, 2021, Simon & Schuster). 9781398505773
- ★ *The Secret Sunshine Project* (Benjamin Dean, 2022, Simon & Schuster). 9781398517875
- ★ *Nothing Ever Happens Here* (Sarah Hagger-Holt, 2020, Usborne). 9781474966238
- ★ *The Accidental Diary of B.U.G.* series (Jen Carney, 2021-ongoing, Puffin).
- ★ *Moonchild* series (Aisha Bushby, 2020-ongoing, Egmont).
- ★ *The Big Book of LGBTQ+ Activities* (Amie Taylor and Liza Stevens, 2020, Jessica Kingsley). 9781787753372
- ★ *From Prejudice to Pride: A History of the LGBTQ+ Movement* (Amy Lamé, 2017, Wayland). 9781526301918

In addition to this, we recommend that a proportion of *all* ongoing buy-ins, no matter how small, is reserved for LGBTIQ+-focused titles.

For example, YouGov found that at least one in five surveyed Britons aged between 18 and 24 chose an option other than

‘Heterosexual/straight’ when asked about their sexuality; using this as a guide, you could set a target such as making sure at least a quarter of your new YA stock contains LGBTIQ+-representation, even if you will be acquiring little of this stock overall.

For a larger library make sure that you look at recommended suppliers and other resources throughout this guide to build and develop a more substantial collection. Again, consider the variety of LGBTIQ+ identities and other factors that may influence experience such as race, disability and class, and ensure you have books that represent as many of these experiences as possible.

In our experience, we have found that LGBTIQ+ people appreciate direct representation, especially positive representation, but also ‘incidental’ inclusion in books where LGBTIQ+ ‘issues’ are not the focus. Beyond this, we believe that titles with LGBTIQ+ inclusion of all kinds are important for all patrons to read, including those who do not identify as queer. We therefore encourage larger branches to again factor LGBTIQ+ representation into *all* new acquisitions, as well as doing special buy-ins of works where this is the focus.

Transphobic books

In the last year especially, there have been a few titles published which claim to be ‘gender critical’ and argue for removal of trans rights. These authors and their work can be

labelled transphobic, and the writers themselves TERFs (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists). We, along with many in the LGBTIQ+ community, find these books offensive.

However, these titles are legally published and members of your community may want to read them. We do not say you shouldn't stock these books or consider methods of censorship around them. Rather, we would recommend to be mindful of and not promote these books, and to think carefully about how many you want to buy, perhaps based solely on individual requests. Furthermore, some of these titles claim to present 'facts' while lacking peer reviewed research, and thus may fall below your local standards of reliability for non-fiction. Be especially careful to make sure you do not make mistakes such as putting them on LGBTIQ+ displays or sections where they might cause upset.

You can interfile them in your general stock and those who want to seek out these titles can always do so via your catalogue without the risk of a LGBTIQ+ person coming across the book in a way that looks like it may be being endorsed. Also be wary of judging a reader's reasons for borrowing one of these books: borrowing a book for free from a library without purchasing it can be a way a reader reads a variety of sources to come to an understanding of a situation.

Collection development policies and supplier specifications

LGBTIQ+ materials should be specifically mentioned in collection development policies (along with materials for other marginalised groups). This will serve as a reminder for staff members who may be less aware of the need to provide LGBTIQ+ materials, and can also be used to support the library's position in the event of a complaint (although in our experience, compared to the USA for example, complaints about LGBTIQ+ materials are rare in the UK).

Similarly, LGBTIQ+ materials should be explicitly mentioned in supplier specifications (including children's specifications). However, be aware that these materials may still not arrive automatically through supplier selection even if they are specifically mentioned - particularly if they are imports or published by small presses. For more on stock procurement, see the '[Library suppliers and specialist bookshops](#)' section.

Library suppliers and specialist bookshops

Mainstream library suppliers, like publishers, are getting better at providing and promoting LGBTIQ+ materials, and sometimes produce recommended lists of titles. However, some materials, particularly in the areas mentioned in '[Ensuring a diverse collection](#)', may not be included in supplier selections or appear on recommended lists. Nonetheless, titles may still be available through your mainstream supplier. Make sure you are searching their entire database: for example, when searching Petranet you may need to untick the 'Enhanced Records Only' box.

Many library authorities have a clause in their supplier contract permitting them to buy from elsewhere if the main supplier is unable to provide an adequate range in specialist areas. It is also a good idea to ensure that some of the collection development budget is set aside for librarians to spend at their discretion, rather than relying on the main supplier to meet all needs.

Mainstream suppliers may list more obscure/independent queer titles without actually having them in their warehouse. You will need to keep an eye on orders and chase the supplier if the book does not seem to be being sent in good time. You may find more than with mainstream titles that these books do not get supplied in the end and you may need to go to a specialist seller to get the title. Persevere to get the book into your collection and do not give up.

Some titles may not be available through mainstream suppliers at all, and for these you may need to go to a specialist LGBTIQ+ bookshop. Specialist bookshops are great sources of information and potential partners; purchasing from them is another way of supporting LGBTIQ+ communities and establishing mutually beneficial working relationships (for more on relationship-building, see [‘Publicity, marketing and outreach’](#)). They may also offer discounts for libraries; if this is not mentioned on their website, contact them and ask.

The following list of specialist bookshops is non-exhaustive and is presented in alphabetical order. We have no financial links

with these organisations and inclusion on the list does not necessarily constitute a 'recommendation'.

- The Bookish Type (an LGBTIQ+ bookshop in Leeds)
<https://thebookishtype.co.uk/>
- Category is Books (an LGBTIQ+ bookshop in Glasgow) <https://www.categoryisbooks.com/>
- Gay's the Word (an LGBTIQ+ bookshop in London)
<https://www.gaystheword.co.uk/>
- Letterbox Library (an online supplier of diverse children's materials) <https://www.letterboxlibrary.com/>
- Lighthouse (a queer-owned independent bookshop in Edinburgh) <https://lighthousebookshop.com/about>
- Paned o Gê (an LGBTIQ+ bookshop in Cardiff)
<https://paned-o-ge.wales/>
- Shelflife (a radical, queer, feminist bookshop in Cardiff)
<https://www.shelflifebookshop.com/>
- The Portal Bookshop (an LGBTIQ+ and science fiction/fantasy bookshop in York)
<https://the-portal-bookshop.square.site/page>
- Queer Lit (an LGBTIQ+ bookshop in Manchester)
<https://www.queerlit.co.uk/>
- 'You Read It Queer First' via Bookshop.org (a curated list of LGBTIQ+ children's and young adult material from children's book marketeer and Pride in Publishing committee member [charlieinabook](#))
<https://uk.bookshop.org/shop/readitqueer>

LGBTIQ+ book awards

Book awards are another useful source of collection development ideas. In the UK, current prizes include:

- Book28 Anti-Prize: a celebration of four recent queer works that Book 28 Library first ran in the summer of 2021, meant to counteract the hierarchies of traditional book prizes.
- PFD Queer Fiction Prize: Peters Fraser and Dunlop literary agents are planning to launch queer fiction prizes with Adult, YA and Children's categories as of 2022.
- The Little Rebels Award is a UK award for children's literature that promotes social justice, and sometimes includes LGBTIQ+ titles: <https://littlerebels.org/>
- The Polari Prizes: The Polari First Book Prize is awarded to a debut author, and the Polari Prize to a non-debut author. A children's/YA Polari prize is in the process of being set up at the time of writing in February 2022.

There are a great number of LGBTIQ+ book awards in the US:

- The Lambda Literary Awards (or "Lammys")
<https://lambdaliterary.org/awards/>
- The Stonewall Book Awards (run by the Rainbow Round Table of the American Library Association)

<https://www.ala.org/rt/rrt/award/stonewall>

→The Publishing Triangle Awards

<https://publishingtriangle.org/awards/>

→The Over the Rainbow Booklist is not a literary prize as such, but a curated annual list of recommended LGBTIQ+ titles for adults, compiled by the Rainbow Round Table of the American Library Association:

<https://www.glbtrt.ala.org/overtherainbow/>

→Similarly, the Rainbow Booklist is a curated annual list of recommended LGBTIQ+ titles for children and young adults, compiled jointly by the Rainbow Round Table and the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association: <https://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/>

Information Resources

Libraries get a great number of enquiries from the general public around all sorts of information and how to access services. Having up to date and accurate information resources to hand is an important part of what we do, along with signposting to reliable services, and the public have come to expect from us.

LGBTIQ+ queries in particular can be of a sensitive and specific nature. Members of the public may not have the confidence to approach a member of staff, so it is good to have paper and web-based information sources available in the library. On the

other hand, frontline library workers should be prepared for the fact that members of the public may see them as someone to reach out to for information, and that they deserve sensitivity, confidentiality and useful information.

Some erroneously assume that library information resources are not needed as modern queer people can 'just Google' the answers to any questions. Whilst the Internet has been an amazing resource for many LGBTIQ+ people, it is not a silver bullet. It requires someone to have a private Internet connection, a well-formulated search, and the understanding to navigate through what can be an overwhelming amount of information returned. Some topics, such as transgender healthcare, attract malicious content and misinformation.

A curated list of reliable information sources can be extremely useful in this context, especially those giving information on legal rights, healthcare and community resources as relevant to LGBTIQ+ groups. Many of the organisations we recommend 'whitelisting' under our [Privacy](#) section can provide free leaflets and information resources across these areas.

In addition, you may wish to consider...

- **Legal/rights:** TUC guidance on sexuality / gender in the workplace; the 'Pink Law' initiative at the Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre; Gendered Intelligence; GALOP; and the Naz and Matt Foundation, who can provide legal support to LGBTIQ+ people facing 'honour'-based abuse, or abuse relating to their culture

- **Health:** Your local public health team may have already done work to reach out to LGBTIQ+ people and may be able to provide you with resources. Other useful charities include Team Prepster, Terrence Higgins Trust, Live Through This (LGBTIQ+ cancer support) and the Pink Therapy directory. Although not LGBTIQ+-focused, other charities, such as Brook (sexual health advice for young people) offer useful LGBTIQ+ resources and information. Trans health in particular can be a minefield to understand and jump hoops to access services. Trans communities have set up thorough information resources and networks and offer advice and mutual aid, such as TransActualUK, GIRES and Gendered Intelligence.
- **Community:** You may get asked about local community groups or venues. Have a look online using your area name and 'LGBT'. This is also an area where it is particularly important to think about other marginalisations that might mean someone doesn't feel comfortable in a 'general' LGBTIQ+ group. For example, many racially marginalised people report experiencing racism even within LGBTIQ+ spaces. A list of 'Queer Black, BAME and POC Charities, Organisations and Community Groups' can be found [here](#), provided by Manchester Pride. Charities such as Regard and Deaf Rainbow UK offer specific information for Deaf and disabled LGBTIQ+ people that many will find invaluable.

It is important to consider format and accessibility with information resources as with other reading material. Visually impaired people, for example, are not any less likely to also be LGBTIQ+, and may require resources in large print or Braille. The charity Choice Support provides information to help people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs make informed choices, and they provide a lot of information on LGBTIQ+ topics in EasyRead and read-aloud formats.

Weeding

Like any other materials, LGBTIQ+ materials should be weeded to ensure an attractive and up-to-date collection. Terminology in particular can move on quite quickly, so look out for materials that may now be considered outdated or offensive and see if there is anything newer that fulfils the same purpose.

However, there are also a few caveats that should be balanced against this:

→As discussed above, some LGBTIQ+ materials are difficult to get hold of. If you've gone to a huge effort to acquire a U.S. import from a specialist supplier, you don't want an overenthusiastic staff member to discard it just because it is a few years old. This is particularly important if you only have a small number of titles for/by/about people from a particular LGBTIQ+ community, or if the book was published by a small press and is unlikely to be reprinted.

- Usage figures should be taken with a pinch of salt when dealing with LGBTIQ+ materials, and a book should not necessarily be removed from the collection just because it does not appear to have been borrowed. Some people may not feel comfortable or safe taking a visibly LGBTIQ+ book home, so may choose to read in the library instead. If the collection as a whole appears to be under-used, this may well be a sign that it needs to be marketed more actively, rather than the books themselves not being appealing to LGBTIQ+ readers.

- Some terms or modes of discussion currently considered outdated may come back into vogue, or serve as useful historical footnotes for the development of thinking on a subject. Therefore more 'outdated' queer literature should not necessarily be removed outright, but one should consider whether a more up-to-date resource on the same topic can be acquired alongside it. Recent resources should be preferred for special highlighting in displays etc., unless there is a reason to prefer an older resource.

- Librarians are not neutral and a malicious or misinformed librarian may take over a collection you have run. They may not put the same enthusiasm and time into maintaining the collection unless they are held to do so by clear collection development guidelines. Your collection is also at risk from self-censorship following a downturn of public or local mood turns against queer people; or even laws - during Section 28 many librarians culled their

collections consciously and unconsciously. Put caveats and procedures into place in policy to protect your collection.

Your collection development policy should therefore include a section on weeding, and we recommend that this should include a special consideration for retaining items representing minority groups. While these items are not always easy to identify, some of the recommendations made elsewhere in this guide will help with this (such as discreet spine labelling, or tagging materials on the catalogue). One option is that you may be able to set up limits on your LMS, that a 'last copy' of a title in a given category cannot be withdrawn apart from by select members of staff.

Stock Organisation

We have slightly different recommendations for stock organisation depending on the audience of that particular library collection. Clearly promoting queer stock and sending a signal of support for queer library users must be balanced with ‘othering’ stock and inadvertently signposting it to those who wish to avoid it (or assume it’s not for them or their children).

Books for adults

We recommend having some form of display to showcase LGBTIQ+ literature within the adult section of your public library (see our [Displays](#) section for more detail).

Overall, these tend to be received positively as a very clear signal to patrons that you are LGBTIQ+ supportive. They could take the form of a whole specialist collection in a large central library, or a single display shelf in a mobile library; or even a wall poster of favourite LGBTIQ+ titles.

There are some possible negative side-effects to be aware of, as well as things you can do to mitigate them. For example...

- A separate section carries a risk of ‘annexing’ or ‘ghettoisation’: all the books with LGBTIQ+ content are relegated to a section where they may be neglected by users who assume they are not relevant to them

- It also risks labelling all books who have an LGBTIQ+ character, theme or author as that being the primary and defining feature of that book
- Looking in this collection may be off-putting to users who are not out, and thus may not wish to be seen looking at the collection
- It can make users aware that a book has LGBTIQ+ content that they didn't realise it had, and this may motivate them to either avoid it themselves or restrict others' access to it (e.g. young people)

However, there are many ways you can cautiously address these issues while still making your LGBTIQ+ stock visible and findable. Please see [displays](#) for our general guidelines.

If you feel a dedicated section is not appropriate, or not for a particular area, another solution is to interfile materials with general stock but provide alternative ways of finding them. These might include: discreet spine labelling (although once again, this can replicate the undesired negative effects); regularly-updated online bibliographies; keyword access via the catalogue (see '[Cataloguing and Metadata](#)'); free booklist leaflets and regular - or even permanent - posters/wall displays.

Books for children and teenagers/young adults

Research suggests that interfiling is generally preferred for LGBTIQ+ materials for young adults. However, you need to

think about how to ensure the books are easy to find, especially as young people may be particularly reluctant to out themselves by asking a staff member for help. Discreet spine labelling, regularly-updated online bibliographies, and displays are all useful tools (see also [‘Search & Retrieval’](#)).

Currently, there are relatively few middle-grade (estimated age 9-12) books with LGBTIQ+ content available. We recommend interfiling those that do exist, but ensuring that they are easy to find using the strategies discussed above.

We would generally recommend interfiling LGBTIQ+ picture books with the general collection, as LGBTIQ+ individuals and families should not be treated as an ‘issue’ or ‘problem’. However, once again, the books need to be easy to find, via regularly-updated online bibliographies, keyword access via the catalogue (see [‘Cataloguing and Metadata’](#)), and/or regular displays.

Some LGBTIQ+ picture books are in fact very issue-driven, and those may be better located in a ‘Parenting’ section. Another option is to have a ‘Families’ section or display, which brings together books about many different types of families. This carries fewer negative connotations than locating the titles with books on challenging ‘issues’, such as bereavement.

Library suppliers (and some librarians) can err heavily on the side of caution in age classification of LGBTIQ+ children’s books, e.g. classifying books written for a middle-grade (junior school) audience as teen or young adult. This can mean that

the children most in need of the books do not find them. It is worth checking the classification of middle-grade titles, and changing it where necessary.

Young people, librarians, parents and book lovers alike have long argued against the sexist categorisation of 'boys' books' and 'girls' books'. This stereotyping is additionally harmful when you consider the needs of LGBTIQ+ youth. Consider if and where you see this being played out and ideas to disrupt.

Displays

Research suggests that LGBTIQ+ people like to see displays of queer books in the library - second only in importance to having the books in the first place. If your library is large enough, we recommend having a permanent display, particularly if you do not have a separate LGBTIQ+ section (see ['Books for adults'](#), above). This does not have to be large - it could be a shelf of face-on books labelled 'Recommended queer reads' or similar - but it helps to send a message that LGBTIQ+ people are always welcome in your library.

If the budget permits, we recommend two copies of as many titles as possible, with one located in a dedicated collection/display, and another interfiled with general stock. This may also be if you buy a hardback and later a paperback and both are still in good condition. This allows people to still encounter the book in the main collection.

When choosing books for a special display, you want to favour 'out and proud' books that also market their LGBTIQ+ content, rather than highlighting those books you happen to know have LGBTIQ+ content even if it's not obvious. For example, books with rainbow/pride flags on the jackets and queer terminology in the title are unlikely to be chosen by those who wish to avoid queer content anyway (either through bigotry or fear of outing themselves), and thus can be promoted on a specialist display without 'outing' readers.

Even if the display does not appear to be 'popular', in terms of people taking books from it then and there, it is still worth having in order to send a message that LGBTIQ+ communities are valued and that the library is a safe space. Not every LGBTIQ+ person will feel confident enough to take a book from a prominent display, but the more that LGBTIQ+ materials are made visible in the library, the more people are likely to feel comfortable borrowing or requesting them.

You may want to reconsider where you have located your display: if the section is in a very busy area, some people may feel self-conscious about looking at it. Conversely, if the section is hidden away, it may be difficult to find (undermining the point of having a separate section at all) and can send a negative message, implying it is something to be ashamed of. Trial and error may be the only way forward, with monitoring of issue figures to assess which location is most successful.

Unfortunately displays and posters may face vandalism or receive complaints. Some library workers have told us of their

LGBTIQ+ signage and stock going missing frequently, put in the bin, moved round or hidden behind other stock. Therefore check on your displays and sections frequently and keep copies of signage you can print out again, and ensure that your [collection development policy](#) covers the need to provide materials for LGBTIQ+ communities as well as guidance on dealing with complaints. You can take the view that this is council property that like anything else should not be destroyed by the public, or just be prepared for it. Also vandalism or complaints may lead cautious or conservative management to want to give up providing these services; however, as pointed throughout this guide, providing services to LGBTIQ+ users is a statutory requirement.

Events

Publicity, Marketing and Outreach

Historically, libraries have not always been welcoming places for LGBTIQ+ communities, and many LGBTIQ+ people assume there's nothing there for them. This means that the maxim of 'if you build it, they will come' does not always apply. However, the audience/user base *is* out there - even if your library is in a small town or rural area. So, if you are not initially getting much take-up for your LGBTIQ+ stock or services, this probably means that you need to be marketing them more actively and directly to LGBTIQ+ communities.

Useful places to try:

- Social media! Try typing in the name of your area along with 'LGBT' or 'queer' on Facebook, Instagram and other social media sites. There are also some sites that are geared directly to LGBTIQ+ people. You may have to search as broadly as the county level, but there will likely be something
- Events websites: OutSavvy is an LGBTIQ+-specific event-posting website; you will also find LGBTIQ+ groups and tags on places like MeetUp and Evenbrite, where you can add library events/clubs
- Go along to LGBTIQ+ events, which you may find on the resources just listed, to support your local communities and hand out flyers for your service and chat to members of the

community

- Don't discount any LGBTIQ+ venues, even if they don't seem a good fit. Often an area's only 'visibly' LGBTIQ+ venue (if one exists at all) will be a nightclub. Many LGBTIQ+ people are interested in both clubbing and libraries, and even those who don't like clubbing might start there when looking for community and find your flyer
- Look for seasonal events, such as Pride Parades / Festivals where the library could have a stall or banner; or LGBT+ History Month programmes happening in your region
- JISCMAIL is an emailing network that joins together people in education and research communities. They have various LGBTIQ+-related mailing lists, such as LGBTQ-HISTORY@JISCMail.AC.UK and LGBTQ@JISCMail.AC.UK where you can share upcoming public events that could be of research interest, to raise their profile
- CILIP's LGBTQ+ Network may also be open to promoting your work and events as part of their showcasing of LGBTIQ+ outreach in libraries. You don't need to be a member of CILIP to use the resources of the network
- LGBTIQ+ news media: there are several national publications in the UK, such as Diva Magazine, PinkNews, GayTimes and Attitude. These have large circulations and

may reach people locally even if they're not regional. Reach out and see if they would like to showcase or promote any events or outreach you're doing, especially if it's a high-profile investment

- Check within your Local Authority. Has anyone in public health, for example, already done outreach? Do they know community advocates they could connect you with?
- Finally, tag Book 28 on any social media promotion of your event! We are usually happy to share examples of public libraries who are putting in the work for LGBTIQ+ users

Often, the best promotion is word-of-mouth, and this goes both ways. Ask any library users who have attended LGBTIQ+ events to promote their existence if they enjoyed them; and also make it clear you're keen to hear and meet more of the local LGBTIQ+ community and hear more about how they share news (though please be aware that some people will not be comfortable disclosing this).

Unfortunately, sometimes LGBTIQ+-supportive content can be targeted with harassment on social media. This might be something you encounter when promoting your library work. We urge libraries not to let this deter them from hosting inclusive events - any more than you would allow racist 'trolls' to deter you from hosting a Black History Month event. However, it is important to have a plan in place to deal with any negative responses.

This may require, for example, turning off commenting on Facebook posts and deleting any abusive comments. On Twitter, it is now possible to 'hide' a post, which will help to prevent followers from seeing it, as well as blocking the person (which will prevent them from interacting with you, but will not prevent others from seeing the offensive posts). We also recommend reporting abusive messages to the platform. As you would with any form of workplace harassment, please do not hesitate to seek support from your management or union while dealing with the emotional effects.

Important dates

There are various named days and months within the year dedicated to recognising and celebrating LGBTIQ+ communities, and these provide ideal opportunities to advertise your LGBTIQ+ stock and services, host events of interest to LGBTIQ+ people, and promote the library through outreach work (e.g. by having a stall at Pride). Some of these days and months are as follows:

- LGBT+ History Month - February
- Trans Day of Visibility - 31st March
- International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia - 17th May
- Pride month - traditionally takes place in June, but different towns and cities now host theirs at different points in the summer.
- Bi Visibility Day - 23rd September
- National Coming Out Day - 11th October

- Transgender Awareness Week - 13th to 19th November, leading up to...
- Transgender Day of Remembrance (which honours trans people who have been murdered due to transphobia) - 20th November

However, we recommend that LGBTIQ+ events and promotions should not be limited to these occasions, but should be embedded in mainstream provision throughout the year. You may also have specific local events in your town or area; following local queer organisations on social media is often the best way to find out about these. We also recommend that intersecting identities should be considered when planning events, e.g. Black queer authors should be included in LGBT+ History Month (and Black History Month).

It is also worth considering how some events might be unintentionally uncomfortable or exclusionary to LGBTIQ+ library users. For example, many children (including but not limited to those with same gender parents) do not have a present mother/father or a positive relationship with them. Heavy marketing of 'Mother's Day' and 'Father's Day' activities, especially when paired with materials that only portray only nuclear families, may leave many children feeling left out. Promoting diverse portrayals of families and general celebration of caregivers can be a far more welcoming alternative. For example, instead of having a craft activity focusing on making a Mother's Day card, children could simply be invited to 'make a card for someone they love'.

LGBT+ History Month

LGBT+ History Month, which takes place in February in the UK, is a great opportunity to showcase your stock and host a programme of queer events. The official website for the month can be found here: <https://lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk/>. Each year has a different theme, and there are plenty of free resources to download; you can also upload your own events to the calendar. However, it is up to you whether you want to focus on that theme or even whether you want to focus on 'history' specifically: many libraries and other organisations interpret the month more broadly as a time to celebrate LGBTIQ+ communities, authors and other creators.

Because LGBT+ History Month takes place towards the end of the financial year, it is important to plan ahead for it and ensure it is included in your events calendar and annual budget.

However, we recognise that many libraries and local authorities are in a difficult budgetary situation currently, and we have therefore provided some suggestions for working round funding difficulties:

- Link up with other parts of the council - e.g. the council equalities team may have funding available to support an events programme
- Look out for other local and national pots of money (see the DCMS list of sources for funding [here](#))

- Link up with another library authority to run virtual events jointly and cross-promote events: some authorities have done this very successfully during Covid, allowing them to provide twice as many events for virtually the same cost and effort
- If all else fails, it costs next to nothing to have a display of LGBTIQ+ books, flags, local history resources, booklists, posters and leaflets in each branch. Indeed this is an excellent way of promoting your queer stock and sending a positive message about inclusion

Some people may be prepared to work for free, while others will not be in a position to do this. We emphasise that **if you can pay people you should**: this is particularly important when working with marginalised communities. LGBTIQ+ people (particularly trans and bi people) have higher rates of poverty on average than straight, cisgender people and their expertise should be valued.

However, authors promoting books may (sometimes) be happy to do an event for free, as may academics who have a regular income from their 'day job', and local organisations with their own funding. **Be clear up-front about whether payment is available or whether you are asking people to volunteer their time.**

It is also worth noting that there are often advantages to running LGBTIQ+ events virtually, or "hybrid" (in person but streamed online for attendees to join also) beyond cost-saving:

- Gaining a wider audience (a particular bonus for events targeting LGBTIQ+ or other specific communities)
- Promoting your library authority as a beacon of inclusive practice, nationally and even internationally
- Improving accessibility: many disabled people welcomed the move to virtual events during Covid, and are now excluded by the shift back to in-person events
- It is easier for people to attend anonymously or without alerting their households/immediate communities
- No / few restrictions on numbers

Once you have addressed funding, what might you want to do for LGBT+ History Month? The following list is by no means exhaustive, but is intended to form a sort of 'LGBT+ History Month 101'.

- **Events:** these could include author talks, film screenings, local history talks, quizzes... even a silent disco! The possibilities are as broad as your imagination. Ideally, include both online and in-person events, to maximise accessibility and reach as many people as possible. Try to feature authors from different areas of the LGBTIQ+ spectrum and with multiply marginalised identities (don't just focus on white cis gay men).

- **Reading groups:** if you don't have a regular LGBTIQ+ reading group, why not host a one-off during the month? This could focus on a specific book, or you could invite everyone to bring a queer book or poem to share. It could also help to gauge whether there is enough interest to host a regular reading group. In addition, general-interest reading groups hosted by the library could read a queer book for LGBT+ History Month.
- Don't forget about **children and young people's events!** They are often overlooked in LGBT+ History Month, but many children and young people are queer or will come to identify as queer, and/or live in queer families. Events could be delivered to schools and/or to the general public, and could include author talks, young people's reading groups, storytimes, drag queen/king storytimes (see below), craft activities, etc.
- **Book chats:** you could host an online book chat (either live or pre-recorded) to showcase some of your favourite queer reads. Potential platforms for hosting these include Facebook Live, Instagram Live, Zoom and YouTube. We have found that many people who can't make a live event will catch up at a later date, so whatever your platform of choice for the live chat, it is a good idea to ensure the video remains available and easily accessible afterwards on a platform such as YouTube.
- **Booklists:** there are many ways of using booklists to highlight recommended or new queer stock. Booklists could

be provided in hard copy or on the library website, on the [Listchallenges](#) website, on your catalogue (OPAC) and/or on your ebook interface (e.g. Libby or BorrowBox). Social media such as Twitter or Instagram can also be used to promote recommended titles, and the general public can be encouraged to share their own favourite queer reads. As with events, be inclusive: feature books on a range of LGBTIQ+ experiences, by authors from different parts of the LGBTIQ+ spectrum and those with multiply marginalised identities.

- **Displays:** ideally, have a display in every branch rather than trying to second-guess where LGBTIQ+ people are most 'likely' to be (spoiler alert: we are everywhere!) (see also '[Displays](#)' section).
- **Social media:** a strong social media presence is always essential to marketing your materials and services, but this is particularly important with LGBTIQ+ communities who may assume the library has nothing for them. Find the most popular LGBT+ History Month tag(s) each year and use them; promote your events; post reading recommendations; engage with local LGBTIQ+ organisations by sharing their posts and events.

Drag Queen Storytimes

Increasing numbers of libraries and other organisations in the UK are now offering drag queen (and sometimes drag king)

storytimes. We felt it would be useful to offer some specific guidance, particularly as there are sometimes misunderstandings around the nature of these events.

Drag queen storytimes were started in the US by author and queer parent Michelle Tea, who found that regular library storytimes, although welcoming, were very straight and did not reflect her family. She came up with the idea of a drag queen storytime as an event that would promote diversity and inclusion, with a sense of the fantastic.

The exact format of a drag queen/king storytime is of course up to you and the performer involved, but they often include the following:

- Songs and rhymes for families to join in with.
- The queen or king reading one or more stories. These may or may not have a queer theme (e.g. *And Tango Makes Three*) or they may have a more general focus on inclusion, diversity and being yourself.
- A craft or other activity. Again, this often has an inclusive focus, such as encouraging children to design their own outfit regardless of rigid gender roles.

While adult drag shows often include a risqué element, this is not the case for drag queen/king storytimes.

Some tips for successful drag queen/king storytimes follow, adapted from Naidoo (2018):

- It is important to find the right performer. There is a UK-wide Drag Queen Story Hour organisation: <https://www.dragqueenstoryhour.co.uk/> or you may wish to contact a local king, queen or organisation; but we strongly recommend using DQSH UK as they will cover most of these aspects (DBS checks, training) with drag acts who know the setting and needs of public library performances. As with any children's event, it is essential that they have an interest in working with children, at minimum a Basic DBS check, and ideally some experience in the area.
- If your chosen performer does not have experience with children's storytimes, we strongly recommend some guidance or brief training beforehand, e.g. inviting the performer to view a library storytime and drawing attention to key points, such as how to hold the book for an audience to view, picking a suitable book to read aloud, and the importance of familiarising yourself with the book beforehand.
- Consider whether you are targeting the event at LGBTIQ+ families, or to everyone. This will affect where and how you market it. If it is to be targeted specifically at LGBTIQ+ families, then it is important to get the word out via community organisations (you may wish to let them know about the event directly via email or tagging them into social media messaging).

Drag queen/king storytimes have the potential to be extremely popular (one of our team members attended a local event that attracted 180 people, and consequently had to be divided into three 'showings'!) but there is also the potential for them to attract transphobic criticism, particularly on social media. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is often from people who are not in fact from the local area, and does not reflect local opinion, but it is important to have a plan in place to deal with any negative comments (cf. '[Publicity, Marketing and Outreach](#)', above). Also consider how activities such as Drag Queen Storytimes can be provided year-round so as to welcome diverse families as part of normal practice.

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Contact

Book 28 Library: book28.library@gmail.com, @book28library

Dr Elizabeth Chapman (Liz): e.chapman@shu.ac.uk,
@lgbtlibrarian

Colette Townend: @colette_lis