

Chapter 4

The Institutional Framework

4.1 Local Agencies' Policies and Procedures

Survey Data

The Local Agencies Survey was distributed to the co-ordinators/managers of 106 'frontline' local statutory and voluntary sector agencies (i.e. agencies providing services directly accessed by young people). Thirty-nine were returned as shown in Table 39.

Table 39: Distribution and Response to Local Agencies Survey

Agency	Number Distributed	Number Returned
Asian and Black Community Organisations	18	1
Health Services	10	4
Housing Agencies	16	8
Social Services Units	23	10
University of Reading Helping Agencies	3	2
Youth and Community Service	9	3
Voluntary Sector Agencies	27	11
Total	106	39

The response rate for the Local Agencies Survey was 37 per cent, although there was a particularly poor response from the co-ordinators/managers of Asian and Black community organisations.

From the survey it emerged that:

- Thirty-eight agencies had an equal opportunities policy and only one did not.
- Thirty-three agencies with a policy included sexual identity while four did not.
- Only two agencies monitored their service users' sexual identity: one statutory health service and one voluntary sector agency. Three agencies *sometimes* monitored their service users' sexual identity: a statutory health service, a statutory mental health agency and a Social Services unit. The statutory health service

reported that 0.17 per cent of its clients were bisexual, 1.7 per cent were gay and 0.05 per cent were lesbian.

- Twenty co-ordinators/managers had provided training for their staff on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues while 18 had not. Seven co-ordinators/managers felt that the quality of this training had been ‘very good’, eight felt it had been ‘good’ and five felt it had been ‘adequate’.
- Twenty-one co-ordinators/managers reported having resources available for service users and staff on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues while 13 did not. Table 40 shows the number and type of agency with resources.

Table 40: Number and Type of Agency with Resources on Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Issues

Agency Type	Number of Agencies Sampled ⁽¹⁾	Number of Agencies with Resources
Health Services	4	2
Housing Agencies	8	2
Social Services Units	10	5
University Agencies	2	2
Voluntary Sector Agencies	11	7
Youth and Community Service	3	3

Note: (1) *n* = 34

- Thirty co-ordinators/managers considered their agency to be a safe environment for staff to be out as bisexual, gay or lesbian while three did not. These three all managed Social Services units and felt that:

“Discrimination by other staff and services users was a big problem.”

“There was prejudice from service users and staff, for example, seeing all gay men as abusers of children, etc.”

- Twenty-five co-ordinators/managers considered their agency to be a safe environment for service users to be out while four did not. These four co-ordinators/managers included three from Social Services units and the senior staff member of a youth and community centre who noted the widespread homophobia of young people using the centre.
- Ten co-ordinators/managers had referred bisexual, gay and lesbian service users to other agencies for additional support while 16 had not. Five co-ordinators/managers referred service users to ReachOUT, two to the Reading Lesbian and Gay Helpline, one to No.5 (a youth counselling service) and one to the University of Reading Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Group.

- Twenty co-ordinators/managers knew about Section 28, five did not and thirteen were not sure. Of the five that did not, three worked for housing agencies and two in the voluntary sector. Of the 13 that were not sure, one worked for a statutory health service, three worked in housing agencies, six were managers of Social Services units and three worked in the voluntary sector.
- Six co-ordinators/managers felt that Section 28 affected the work of their organisation while 16 did not and 12 were not sure. Of those who felt that it did affect their agency, five managed Social Services units and one a youth and community centre. One Social Services unit manager stated that:

“Staff assumed that all discussion of homosexuality was illegal. Staff were cautious around the issue and some felt that Section 28 promoted homophobia.”

The youth and community centre manager stated that:

“Some schools were anxious about discussing homosexuality and that staff worried that it was illegal to discuss the issue.”

- The 12 co-ordinators/managers that were not sure whether Section 28 affected them worked for both statutory and voluntary sector agencies not covered by the legislation.
- Twenty co-ordinators/managers felt that Section 28 should be repealed. One Social Services unit manager felt that it should not.
- Co-ordinators/managers were asked how their agencies’ services could be improved for young bisexuals, gays and lesbians. Their responses are shown in Figure 37.

Figure 37: Managers’ Views on Potential Service Delivery Improvements

Agency	Potential Service Delivery Improvements
Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishing a bisexual, gay and lesbian service users’ support group. ▪ Improving resources and training on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. ▪ Recruiting more bisexual, gay and lesbian staff.
Housing Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving training around bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. ▪ More contact with bisexual, gay and lesbian helping organisations. ▪ Monitoring users’ opinions of services. ▪ Researching service users’ needs. ▪ Providing more information on support services for bisexual, gay and lesbian people. ▪ Monitoring service users’ sexual identity.

Social Services Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving training. ▪ More literature and resources on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. ▪ More openness about sexual identity within Social Services generally. ▪ Positive bisexual, gay and lesbian imagery and literature. ▪ Awareness raising campaigns about bisexuality and homosexuality. ▪ More information about services and support for bisexuals, gays and lesbians.
Voluntary Sector Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More openness within the sector about sexual identity. ▪ A lesbian, gay and bisexual centre. ▪ Co-ordinated services. ▪ Ensuring that agencies' literature and resources are inclusive. ▪ More research into service users' needs. ▪ Improved training materials on sexual identity issues. ▪ Regular presentations/workshops on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.
Youth and Community Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving training, particularly on sexual identity and stereotypes.

- Co-ordinators/managers were asked what needs their agencies had in terms of working with young bisexuals, gays and lesbians. Their responses are shown in Figure 38.

Figure 38: Agencies' Needs

Agency	Needs
Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More training around sexual identity. ▪ More resources on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.
Housing Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examples of good practice. ▪ Recommendations on how to ensure open and accessible services for all users. ▪ Changes to discriminatory legislation. ▪ Specific training on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.
Social Services Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More training on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. ▪ More appropriate and sensitive literature. ▪ More openness about sexual identity within Social Services.

Social Services Units [continued]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To work more closely with Health Promotion. ▪ More training materials on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.
Voluntary Sector Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More funding. ▪ More resources on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. ▪ More research into sexual identity issues.

Training Provision

Figure 39 shows details of training provision by local statutory and voluntary agencies on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.

Figure 39: Training provision by Local Statutory and Voluntary Agencies

Agency	Details of Training Provision
Berkshire Probation Service	Had delivered external and in-house training on equal opportunities and anti-discrimination (as part of core training). Also provision of specific training on sexual identity issues by an external agency which was also part of core training.
Reading Borough Council (Education)	No provision for teachers and no schools had requested any advice on bisexual, gay and lesbian-related matters.
Reading Borough Council (Social Services and Housing)	Sexual identity covered in equal opportunities/anti-discrimination module, but no specific training. Provision is external and in-house. <i>During interviews with three housing workers (from Homelessness, Housing Advice and Housing Allocations), two stated that sexual identity had not been covered in their core training. One worker expressed a need for training about putting equal opportunities into practice, with service users and staff.</i>
Reading Voluntary Action (Reading's council for voluntary service)	Had delivered specific training for voluntary sector, facilitated by an external agency in 1998.

Youth and Community Service	Sexual identity issues had been covered in equal opportunities training, but no specific training. The Service was yet to decide what was core and what was optional training. Outside agencies may deliver some aspects of training.
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Discussion

ReachOUT's research project found that of those agencies surveyed, most had an equal opportunities policy that included sexual identity. However, there seemed to be considerable distance between policy commitment and practice. For example, most agencies did not monitor service users' sexual identity, half had not provided any specific training for staff and over one third had no specific resources around bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. Although policy commitment is to be welcomed, the following questions need to be posed: how do agencies expect to ensure equal access and equal opportunities when they do not monitor how many bisexuals, gays or lesbians are using their services? How do they expect to provide inclusive services if they do not equip their workers with appropriate experience and skills through resources and training?

A majority of co-ordinators/managers considered their agency to be a safe environment for both staff and service users to be out as bisexual, gay or lesbian. This view seems to contrast with that of bisexual, gay and lesbian staff the author made contact with. It also seems to contrast with the views of young people as expressed in previous chapters. This discrepancy is in need of further investigation.

A majority of co-ordinators/managers did not know about Section 28 or its potential implications for service delivery. This is a double-edged sword as knowledge of Section 28 may have discouraged those who had considered bisexual, gay and lesbian issues from doing so. However, ignorance is rarely progressive. Interestingly, most of those who were not sure about whether Section 28 affected their work were not covered by the legislation. This confirms the author's view on the efficacy and objective of Section 28. It has never been tested in a court of law but it has served its intended purpose: to confuse and discourage workers from considering bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.

Co-ordinators/managers identified several potential areas/initiatives for improving services for bisexuals, gays and lesbians. These can be summarised as:

- The need for information about local bisexual, gay and lesbian organisations and helping services.
- The need for more openness about sexuality and bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.
- The need for inclusive resources and services.

- The need for specific resources.
- The need for examples of good practice.
- The need for research and/or service users' needs and views.
- The need for improved training around bisexual, gay and lesbian issues.

With regards to training locally, only Berkshire Probation Service and Reading Voluntary Action have provided any *specific* training around bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. Other agencies have subsumed this within equal opportunities training, which arguably is not sufficient. There is also a need to follow up awareness/equal opportunities training with training/workshops about *how* to put this into effect in terms of service delivery and to consider the agency environment for bisexual, gay and lesbian staff.

In terms of local agencies addressing bisexual, gay and lesbian issues and needs, as expressed through their policies, procedure and practice, there is a mixed picture. Some agencies have or have begun to acknowledge and action these issues whilst others have not. There is no clear statutory/voluntary sector divide on these issues; neither sector is more progressed or progressive on these issues. Importantly, the private sector was not considered by this study and so is an unknown quantity. This will need to be remedied by future study.

The mixed picture means that individual co-ordinators/managers have been left to address (or not) these issues using their experience, knowledge and skills. Crucially, this process has often been dependent on their personal commitment or a result of lobbying by staff and/or service users. The mixed picture reflects the fact that no central or local government agency – central government, health authority, local government, etc. – has provided any guidance or lead on bisexual, gay and lesbian issues. The result is patchy provision; provision that is not standardised in terms of quality. Bisexual, gay and lesbian young people cannot assume they will receive the appropriate and quality services they should be able to expect. For example in terms of monitoring, policies and training provision many agencies locally do not even acknowledge that they exist, never mind their issues and needs.