



# Portrayal of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People on the BBC

**Executive Summaries  
and Recommendations**

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## **Foreword**

The BBC has an obligation to serve all its audiences and I firmly believe that none of us can do our job in the BBC without understanding our viewers and listeners. As Director of Audio & Music, I hear from listeners on a daily basis and its something that I welcome.

As part of the BBC's diversity strategy, twelve months ago I volunteered to chair the BBC's Working Group on the Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences.

We wanted to gain a deeper understanding of what all audiences thought about the way lesbian, gay and bisexual people are portrayed across our services.

We carried out one of the most comprehensive pieces of audience research ever done in this area by a broadcaster. It included qualitative and quantitative research and a public consultation exercise, which attracted comment from almost ten thousand viewers and listeners.

A lot of the people we talked to spoke positively about our output. That said it was clear that we have a long way to go before lesbian, gay and bisexual audiences in particular feel that they are reflected authentically and accurately across our output.

This report tells the story of the work the BBC has done in this area so far and presents the recommendations the BBC will be taking forward as a result as well as the executive summaries from the full reports of both the audience research and public consultation.

All of this offers new insight – not only to the BBC but the whole industry – which is why we're keen to share it. We'll be talking to other broadcasters and sharing this with independent production companies.

I'm very pleased that the BBC has led from the front in this area and look forward to seeing how this important piece of work informs how we seek to reflect accurately and authentically all diversity in the UK.

**Tim Davie**

**Director of Audio & Music, BBC Chair, BBC Working Group on Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences**

## Introduction

The BBC's diversity strategy, through which the corporation strives to reflect the diversity of the nation, has driven the work of the BBC's Working Group on the Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Audiences which was set up in April 2009.

The Working Group's remit was to look at the BBC's editorial policy and practice in this area and to identify opportunities to enhance creativity and audience engagement to improve its portrayal of lesbian women, gay men and bisexual people.

The aim of the Working Group was "to enhance the BBC's creative output and fulfil its key public purpose of representing the nations, regions and communities which states that the BBC should:

- Portray and celebrate the range of cultures and communities across the UK
- Provide a range of output including original content, designed to meet the needs of the nations, regions and communities of the UK
- Provide engaging output that gives an accurate picture of the many communities that make up the UK and that informs understanding and stimulates discussion about their concerns [BBC Working Group on the Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences, [Terms of Reference, Appendix 1](#)]."

The Working Group is made up of commissioners, programme makers and senior executives and it has worked with LGB community and voluntary sector organisations and other partners to identify and share examples of good practice to help inform solutions for further improvement.

## BBC Working Group Activity

The Working Group sought to develop a deeper understanding of what all audiences think about how the BBC portrays LGB people across its services.

The Working Group commissioned a comprehensive and unprecedented programme of audience engagement in this area involving both audience research and public consultation. This was important to understanding the perceptions, experiences and recommendations of all audiences.

Both qualitative and quantitative audience research was conducted with all audiences focusing on portrayal of LGB people across all broadcast media generally, including BBC services.

The Working Group also conducted a public consultation on this topic offering anyone the opportunity to give their views on how well the BBC portrays LGB people. The public consultation was designed to complement the audience research and to provide added richness to the audience research findings.

The Working Group also met with a range of LGB community and voluntary sector organisations during the course of their work to inform their examination of the BBC's practice in this area.

## **Key issues raised through the audience research and consultation**

This report presents the executive summaries of both the audience research and consultation reports. Those can both be found in full at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/>

Both the audience research and the consultation offer the BBC, and the wider industry, detailed information on how both LGB and heterosexual people perceive portrayal of LGB people.

The audience research looked in great depth at the perceptions of heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual and gay people and was able to explore the views of heterosexual audiences and to distinguish between the perceptions of those who were more and less comfortable with portrayal of LGB people on television, radio and online. Equally, the audience research looked in detail at the views of LGB people, including the extent to which lesbian, gay and bisexual audience members being 'out' about their sexual orientation in their personal and working lives affected how they perceive portrayal of LGB people in the media.

There was striking consistency between what both the audience research and the consultation found, and in what audiences, both LGB and heterosexual, said they wanted from the BBC in relation to improving how LGB people are portrayed on the BBC.

Following our audience research and consultation, we know more about what all audiences think about the portrayal of LGB people:

- LGB people feel very strongly about the importance, amount and quality of portrayal of LGB people
- LGB and heterosexual audiences who are comfortable with the portrayal of LGB people on TV, radio and online want broadly the same things
- There is a significant minority among heterosexual audiences who are uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people

We've also learned more about the significance of a series of factors and their impact on the quality of the BBC's portrayal of LGB people, offering us clear direction for improvement:

- Authenticity is crucial to improving portrayal of LGB people
- Genre sets the context for audiences' expectations of portrayal of LGB people and there are different lessons for programme types
- Platform also affects audiences' expectations of portrayal of LGB people offering us lessons for our content on-screen, on-air and online
- Intimacy in same-sex relationships can be difficult for uncomfortable heterosexual audiences, for some parents and even for heterosexual people who are more comfortable with portrayal of LGB people
- Language and tone are particularly important to LGB audiences; they expect homophobia to be challenged
- Role models play an important role for LGB audiences keen to see a greater range and diversity of on-air and on-screen LGB presenters, performers, journalists etc.

It is important that we listen to all our audiences. From this audience research and consultation we know that there is a minority among heterosexual audiences who are uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people and that there are lessons in how to present that content to them.

We also now know what both LGB and comfortable heterosexual people clearly want from the BBC in relation to the portrayal of LGB people:

- More portrayal of LGB people, which reflects more lesbian women and bisexual people
- Portrayal which reflects a greater diversity of LGB people overall
- Importance of authentic, non-stereotypical portrayal of all LGB people

- Importance of a balance, both incidental and overt, which is integrated across BBC programming, and more landmark programmes
- Importance of highlighting and celebrating BBC portrayal of LGB people

## **What we commit to do: BBC Working Group Recommendations**

The Working Group will be taking forward these recommendations within the BBC, agreed by the BBC's Diversity Board, chaired by Mark Thompson:

1. BBC commits to addressing the issues raised through the audience research and consultation to achieve accurate and authentic portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people across its services.
2. All BBC editorial heads will be responsible for identifying how to address the key issues raised and overseeing resulting activity
3. All BBC editorial heads will be responsible for debriefing outcomes of audience research and consultation with their teams
4. BBC will review this audience research and consultation again in two years to ascertain whether the BBC has moved forward in the eyes of our audiences
5. BBC Working Group on the Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences will monitor pan-BBC implementation on behalf of Diversity Board

## **Key Findings from audience research into the portrayal of lesbian women, gay men and bisexual people in broadcast media**

### **1. LGB people want to see more, and greater diversity within, LGB portrayal**

Specifically:

- Diversity within portrayal of LGB people, showing LGB people of all different backgrounds and life experiences. In particular, they want to see more lesbian women and depictions of bisexual identity, as well as alternatives to stereotypes of gay men.
- Integrated portrayal of LGB people across all genres, so that their sexual orientation is not always a defining factor or the focal point for their inclusion.

- More portrayal of LGB people overall and in particular that this content is flagged up, and broadcasters are seen to have pride and confidence in it.

Heterosexual people who are comfortable with the portrayal of LGB people also want broadly the same, although LGB people's opinions tend to be stronger.

## **2. The portrayal of LGB people is not always noticed by audiences**

It can be hard for audiences, particularly heterosexual people, to form an opinion on the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media. When prompted, even LGB people can be surprised by the amount and range of portrayal, although they tend to think there is too little overall.

## **3. Context is critical to how all audiences perceive the portrayal of LGB people**

Context is shaped primarily by the genre of a programme. For example, audiences want humour in the portrayal of LGB people to have wide parameters, but news to be reported with impartial yet consistent language and tone, while drama and factual programming should include authenticity. Following genre, audience expectations are also set by the media platform (e.g. TV, radio or online), when the programme is scheduled for broadcast, and the talent featured.

## **4. The clear majority of the UK population are either comfortable with, or do not feel strongly either way about, the portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people**

Comfort with the portrayal of LGB people is largely tied up with audiences' personal experiences, social contexts and overall media diet. There is a significant minority of the UK population (19%) who describe themselves as uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people, while a third (32%) are ambivalent and half (50%) are comfortable with it. The levels of comfort have been derived from answers to multiple questions about different aspects of portrayal. Owing to rounding, the percentages may not sum to 100.

## **5. Intimacy, both emotional and physical, is the primary concern for people who are uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people**

Uncomfortable people feel strongly about the portrayal of LGB people and would like to see less of it. They often cite content to which children could potentially be exposed and the possible need to explain behaviour or

relationships as a reason for their discomfort. As a result, they tend to screen out the portrayal of LGB people. However there are some contexts within which this group can feel less uncomfortable with LGB portrayal; for instance, if it is in relevant, familiar content, and it contains a reflection of their own worldview.

## **6. The BBC fares relatively well with its portrayal of LGB people, but there is more to be done**

Overall, the portrayal of LGB people by the BBC compares relatively well to other broadcasters (behind Channel 4, but ahead of the other main broadcasters). However, portrayal which causes offence can quickly challenge views of the BBC. For heterosexual people uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people, the primary concern is that the BBC remains an impartial and trusted family media provider. Meanwhile, LGB people and those comfortable with LGB portrayal want the BBC to have a cohesive and confident approach to its LGB portrayal.

# Executive Summary – audience research into the portrayal of lesbian women, gay men and bisexual people in broadcast media

## A. The Research Process

### 1. Why we conducted the research

The BBC has a public purpose to represent the UK, its nations, regions and communities. This project looked into the portrayal of lesbian women, gay men and bisexual people (LGB people) in broadcast media and forms part of the BBC's ongoing programme of research into the portrayal of diversity.

The overall objective of this project was to find out how the BBC and broadcast media in general are perceived by audiences to be performing in this area and to identify how the BBC can improve where needed.

### 2. What the research looked at

The research in this report comprised a qualitative study followed by a quantitative survey. The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding not only of what LGB people think of LGB portrayal in broadcast media in the UK, but also to gather the views of a representative sample of the UK population overall. There was a specific focus on the BBC's portrayal of LGB people.

The research investigated the following areas:

- thoughts on the **amount** of portrayal of LGB people across all media platforms for the BBC and other broadcasters
- how audiences **evaluate** the portrayal of LGB people, including how **important** they feel it to be, whether they are **comfortable** with it, how they feel about **intimacy** generally and if there are any **taboos**
- the role of **context** in making sense of the portrayal of LGB people, including the impact of the **media platform** (TV, radio & online), the content **genre** and the programme **scheduling**
- how audiences feel about **humour, language and tone** in the portrayal of LGB people
- the question of **authenticity** and **stereotyping** in the portrayal of LGB people
- the balance of:

- **incidental portrayal** of LGB people (depicting people, circumstances and stories which just happen to include LGB portrayal; here sexual orientation is not the key driver to any story or character and is only referred to in passing, if at all)
- **overt portrayal** of LGB people (where stories or issues about LGB people are deliberately featured in order to raise the subject; here, sexual orientation is at the heart of the story or the reason for including those people or characters)
- and **landmark LGB content** (content which pushes boundaries in terms of the portrayal of LGB people; it can be felt to 'belong' to LGB communities and become culturally iconic)
- how audiences feel about **talent** (presenters, performers, journalists etc.) when it comes to the portrayal of LGB people
- how audiences perceive the **BBC's portrayal of LGB people** and what improvements they would like to see.

### 3. How the qualitative study was conducted

The qualitative phase of the research consisted of focus groups and in-depth interviews with LGB and heterosexual people, which were conducted by 2CV Research for the BBC.

The participants were carefully selected in order to represent a wide array of backgrounds and life experiences. Thus, they very deliberately comprised a range of ages, genders, social grades, nations, rural versus urban locations, ethnicities, religions and current uses of BBC content. The research encompassed a range of demographics and behaviours in order to ensure that it was based on a sample which best reflected the views of people across the UK.

The LGB groups comprised people who were at different stages in their 'coming out' journey with regards to their sexual orientation. They included LGB people who were

- out and established in their sexual orientation
- recently out to most friends and family
- not yet out to most friends and family

Meanwhile, the heterosexual groups consisted of some who were more and some who were less comfortable with the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media.

Thirty research sessions of two hours each were conducted in total, fairly evenly split between the LGB and the heterosexual audiences. These sessions varied in terms of qualitative method depending on what was deemed most appropriate for each type of group. Ultimately, the 30 sessions comprised five group discussions, nine mini group discussions, five discussions with groups of three people and 8 paired interviews. For context, three individual interviews were carried out with experts who work closely with LGB people.

The expert depth interviews were conducted with the following counsellors:

- One whose role was to support young LGB people & older gay men in Eastern England
- One independent counsellor in Scotland who supports a range of LGB and transgender people
- One who supports gay men of all ages new to North West England

Each of the sessions was a moderated discussion or interview stimulated by and to a large extent focusing on examples of TV, radio and online content which included the portrayal of LGB people. The stimulus was a wide range of material covering LGB content from the BBC and other commercial broadcasters for TV. Radio and online content was just sourced from the BBC. Respondents were given clips and articles to look at and think about before the sessions. Other stimulus was introduced during the sessions themselves where necessary or appropriate.

#### **4. How the quantitative study was conducted**

The quantitative survey was conducted by Kantar Media for the BBC and comprised two samples. Firstly, a nationally representative sample of 1,625 UK adults aged 16+ were surveyed face-to-face.

53 LGB respondents (10 lesbian women, 18 gay men and 25 bisexual people) were identified within this nationally representative sample. There is no accepted profile of lesbian, gay and bisexual people within the UK. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) introduced a sexual identity question on the Integrated Household Survey [Office of National Statistics – Measuring Sexual Identity: An Evaluation Report September 2010] (IHS) from January 2009. ONS focussed on collecting data based on how people identify themselves at the time of the interview. This is because no single question can capture the full complexity of sexual orientation. The IHS data indicated that from April 2009 to March 2010, 1.5% of adults (16+) identified themselves as a gay man, a lesbian woman or a bisexual person. This is broadly consistent with other comparable surveys in the UK that have asked questions about sexual

identity. It is important to note that the IHS is an experimental data source. Experimental statistics are new official statistics undergoing evaluation. This estimate is below what is seen as the most commonly used estimate which stands at 5-7% [Final Regulatory Impact Assessment: Civil Partnership Act 2004]. It should be noted these were based on the findings of a number of studies which used different methods of administration and were conducted among differing sampling populations measuring different dimensions of sexual orientation (Betts, P. 2008. Developing survey questions on sexual identity: UK experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation. London: Office of National Statistics). The incidence of LGB people from the nationally representative sample we conducted was 3%.

Secondly, a boost sample of 510 LGB respondents completed the same questionnaire online. The LGB boost sample was obtained from Kantar Media's online Lightspeed panel. A screening question was sent out asking panel members whether they identified themselves as a lesbian woman, gay man or bisexual person and those who did were then invited to take part in the full survey.

The final proportion of lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents in the LGB boost was:

- 148 gay men
- 100 lesbian women
- 262 bisexual people (98 men; 164 women)

For the purposes of this report, the 53 LGB people who were identified within the face-to-face, nationally representative sample have been included with the LGB boost and together they are reported as 'the LGB sample'.

As there is no accepted profile of lesbian, gay and bisexual people within the UK it was not possible to set quotas or to subsequently weight the data.

In terms of what stage they claimed to be at in their 'coming out' journey with regards to their sexual orientation, the LGB boost sample divided as follows:

- 11% were not out at all
- 20% were out to some but not others
- 69% were out to everyone / most people

It should be noted that this breakdown is not necessarily representative of the LGB population in the UK and only reflects the way this particular boost sample segmented.

## **B. An overview of the findings**

### **1. Important background factors to understanding how audiences think about the portrayal of LGB people**

#### **The portrayal of LGB people is assessed by audiences according to its potential impact on others as well as their own immediate responses**

When discussing the portrayal of LGB people in the qualitative sessions, all audiences tended to evaluate LGB portrayal in the light of how they perceived others might relate to it, as well as their own immediate emotional response to a scenario, storyline, article and so on.

Moreover, this evaluation tended to be informed by people's real-world knowledge and understanding of LGB people, provided by the type of contact they had had with LGB people and the LGB issues they had come across in their typical overall media diet, as well as their own lived experience.

#### **The context for interpreting the portrayal of LGB people is shaped by social, personal and editorial factors**

In the qualitative groups it became clear that context was critical for grounding the portrayal of LGB people, shaping expectations around what was editorially permissible and creating the best possible chance of authentic and accurate portrayal.

This framework by which people made sense of the portrayal of LGB people encompassed the personal and social factors explained in the section above, which can lend particular meaning, amplification or endorsement to the portrayal of LGB people.

However, context was also signalled by the content itself. In this respect, genre, scheduling and media platform were critical in enabling a better understanding of LGB portrayal and the emotional response to that portrayal. The influence of these factors is explored further in Section 4 below.

Finally, interpretation of the portrayal of LGB people also depended on familiarity with the specific programme or website, the talent featured and topics under discussion themselves.

## **The clear majority of the UK population are either comfortable with, or do not feel strongly either way about, the portrayal of LGB people**

Using the findings from the nationally representative sample from the quantitative study (including the 3% who identified as a lesbian woman, gay man or bisexual person), we were able to group the proportions of the UK population by their relative comfort levels with the portrayal of LGB people across broadcast media. Their levels of comfort have been derived from answers to multiple questions about different aspects of portrayal.

- 19% were very comfortable
- 31% were comfortable
- 32% were neither comfortable or uncomfortable
- 9% were uncomfortable
- 9% of the UK population identified as very uncomfortable

Numbers above rounded so percentages add up 100%.

This means that 50% of the UK population might be regarded as people comfortable with LGB portrayal, 32% who are more ambivalent and 19% might be regarded as people uncomfortable with LGB portrayal.

In the group of comfortable people (50% of the UK population) there were some who were clear advocates for more and improved LGB portrayal, including less stereotypical representation. The least comfortable group (9% of the UK population) were a minority, although the viewpoints they held could be quite strong. The more ambivalent 32% of the UK population had no strong views one way or the other.

## **2. LGB people's thoughts on LGB portrayal in broadcast media**

### **Perhaps unsurprisingly, LGB people considered LGB portrayal in broadcast media to be important**

In the quantitative study, as might be expected, the LGB sample tended to see the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media as being important. Television emerged as the platform where portrayal was most important; as over three fifths of the LGB sample said that content featuring LGB people was important on TV, compared with just under half for radio. The same

pattern (TV over radio) was also true of the heterosexual population although their views were less strong.

### **LGB people generally felt under-served in terms of the amount of LGB portrayal**

In the quantitative study, a far greater proportion of the LGB sample than heterosexual people thought that there was not enough portrayal of lesbian women, gay men and bisexual people across all media platforms. For example, 52% of the LGB sample said there was too little lesbian portrayal on TV, contrasting strongly with just 11% for the heterosexual population.

It is worth noting that LGB people were also particularly conscious that there should be more portrayal of other groups, such as disabled and black and minority ethnic audiences, as well as their own.

LGB respondents in the qualitative groups did acknowledge that there is more portrayal of LGB people now than there used to be and that the quality of that portrayal has improved. However, they remained fairly dissatisfied with the amount of portrayal overall and wanted to see more of it.

### **Lesbian women in particular noted a lack of portrayal**

In the quantitative study, each group (gay men, lesbian women and bisexual people) tended to feel under-represented in terms of their own sexual orientation and did not feel as strongly about other groups as they did about their own. In the qualitative discussions, lesbian women in particular perceived a lower amount of portrayal of lesbian women versus that for gay men, something that gay men appeared to acknowledge.

In terms of stages in the 'coming out' journey, it was the LGB segment who were out to everyone or most people that particularly felt there to be too little portrayal of LGB people.

### **The stage at which LGB respondents were in their 'coming out' journey exerted more influence on how important LGB portrayal was perceived to be than whether they were a gay man, lesbian woman or bisexual person**

In the quantitative study, those who were out to everyone or to most people felt most strongly about the importance of LGB portrayal, and the segment who weren't out at all felt comparatively less so, although they did still deem the portrayal of LGB people to be important.

In the qualitative sessions, it was those not yet out to most family and friends and those recently out who tended to express the greatest need of positive and sensitive portrayal of LGB people.

### **LGB people wanted to see more diversity within LGB portrayal**

In the qualitative discussions, LGB people tended to be generally pleased with any LGB portrayal, but called for greater diversity. For example:

- Lesbian women wanted to see a wider range of LGB people, not least many more different types of lesbian women.
- Gay men perceived a greater amount and diversity of portrayal of their own group, but still felt that broadcasters relied on stereotypes, especially 'camp' stereotypical characters and people, and wanted these to be offset.
- Bisexual people particularly wanted helpful portrayal of bisexual people that goes beyond simply representing bisexual behaviour, in ways that address negative perceptions of their bisexual identity.

LGB people in qualitative discussions also wanted to see the portrayal of LGB people more flagged and celebrated by broadcasters.

## **3. Heterosexual people's thoughts on LGB portrayal in broadcast media**

### **3.1 Amount of portrayal of LGB people**

#### **The heterosexual population did not feel as strongly as the LGB sample about the need for the portrayal of LGB people**

In the quantitative study, around one third of heterosexual people described the portrayal of LGB people as important; a further third had no strong view, describing it as neither important nor unimportant; and just under a quarter described it as unimportant (around a tenth didn't know). More heterosexual women thought the portrayal of LGB people to be important than did heterosexual men.

#### **Heterosexual people were also largely ambivalent about the amount of LGB portrayal**

In the qualitative discussions, it became evident that heterosexual people were not always aware of the amount of portrayal of LGB people and,

depending on their media habits, could be surprised at the amount when prompted.

Furthermore, the quantitative study showed that this audience could be ambivalent about the amount of portrayal across media platforms. For example, just under half of the heterosexual population thought that there was the right amount of portrayal of LGB people on TV, while just over a quarter said that they didn't know. Although there was a similar pattern on radio, even more heterosexual people answered that they didn't know if there was too much or too little LGB portrayal than they did with TV.

### **Those heterosexual people who felt there was too much portrayal of LGB people were likely to be male and older**

There was a relatively small proportion of the heterosexual population for whom there was too much portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media. Overall, 21% of the heterosexual population felt that there was too much portrayal of gay men on television.

This was more the case for heterosexual men (24% of whom thought there was too much portrayal of gay men on TV) and the older population of 55+ (30%). These are the groups who typically say they feel less comfortable with LGB content on TV.

## **3.2 Comfort with the portrayal of LGB people**

### **Nearly half of the heterosexual population were comfortable with the portrayal of LGB people**

As with the UK population overall, on the basis of this survey close to half of heterosexual people were comfortable with content featuring LGB people on TV and radio, and around a quarter felt indifferent. However, nearly a quarter felt uncomfortable with content featuring LGB people on TV and a fifth with such content on radio.

Similar to the findings regarding the amount of portrayal, heterosexual men and those over 55 years of age were more likely to feel uncomfortable with content featuring LGB people than their female or younger counterparts.

### **Heterosexual people's comfort with LGB portrayal in broadcast media depended on their experience and knowledge of LGB communities**

It was discovered during the qualitative research that heterosexual people who were uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people tended to lack knowledge and understanding with respect to LGB communities. They were likely to have a basic awareness of LGB people existing in the world and their current interaction with LGB people was typically at a level of acceptance of LGB acquaintances in a local community but little beyond this.

As such, they were not always able to make sense of the portrayal of LGB people. This meant they could refuse to engage with it or simply disliked it. They could also find some portrayal of LGB people quite distasteful and offensive.

Uncomfortable heterosexual people in the qualitative study expressed concern about the portrayal of LGB people legitimising LGB identity as a 'lifestyle choice' for young people.

Meanwhile, although comfortable heterosexual audiences in the qualitative study tended to have more familiarity with LGB people, they could still be shown new aspects of LGB lives and were interested to see a broader range of LGB people portrayed in broadcast media content.

### **All degrees of intimacy are harder for heterosexual people to be comfortable with when they feature same-sex couples as opposed to heterosexual couples**

In terms of intimacy within portrayal in broadcast media, there were marked differences in how the heterosexual population felt about intimacy between heterosexual people and LGB people. When asked in the quantitative survey, heterosexual people expressed more discomfort with scenes featuring the same sexes than corresponding scenes between heterosexual couples. In terms of LGB intimacy, they felt more comfortable with two women rather than two men featuring in the same scenarios.

Moreover, as the degrees of intimacy were increased, levels of discomfort with the scenes involving LGB people amongst the heterosexual population increased. Indeed, heterosexual people were much less comfortable with sex scenes than they were with scenes involving kissing. This was mostly driven by men and the older, over 55 year old group. The heterosexual population were more comfortable with scenes showing couples holding hands than kissing and although the same pattern held true for scenes involving a man and a woman, levels of comfort were markedly higher than for the same scene featuring gay men or lesbian women.

Levels of comfort increased after the watershed, although 27% of the heterosexual sample still felt very uncomfortable with scenes involving two

men having sex after 9pm, and 22% with sex scenes of two women following the watershed.

### **Uncomfortable heterosexual people in particular find content featuring emotional or physical intimacy between LGB people more difficult**

When discussed in the qualitative groups, there was a particular resistance among uncomfortable heterosexual people to any suggestion of physical intimacy in the portrayal of LGB people. This was not just in terms of sex, but also kissing, hugging, hand-holding or any implied intimacy.

On the basis of the qualitative evidence, there was also discomfort among uncomfortable heterosexual people around emotional intimacy in the portrayal of LGB people. Real and intense relationships where strong feelings and emotions between members of the same sex were on display were difficult for uncomfortable heterosexual people to consume.

### **Comfortable heterosexual people could be more sensitive to LGB portrayal than LGB people themselves**

Overall, in the qualitative research, comfortable heterosexual people were open to the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media. They mirrored the requests of LGB people to see greater demographic diversity in LGB portrayal, less stereotyping and no perceived homophobia within content featuring LGB people.

Indeed, comfortable heterosexual people could be offended on the behalf of LGB people if they felt that the portrayal was in any way negative or homophobic. The choice of language used, tone and overt stereotyping were therefore key concerns in this respect.

### **There were still areas of discomfort for some comfortable heterosexual people**

Comfortable heterosexual people in the qualitative research were not always fully knowledgeable about LGB people or were not used to seeing the entire spectrum of LGB lives portrayed in broadcast media. As a result, they could still find some portrayal disconcerting or even shocking, particularly scenes of sexual intimacy. Later, however, they might acknowledge that they did not want to have this initial reaction.

#### **4. Key editorial issues when it comes to the portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media**

##### **Genre strongly influenced the way audiences perceived LGB portrayal in broadcast media**

It was evident in the qualitative research that genre lends critically important context to portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media. So, audience needs are different according to the genre.

- **Comedy and Entertainment:** crucial with respect to these genres was a demand for clarity of intent in humour, essentially cues to knowing that no malice was intended. For some, humour with apparently malicious intent and without an LGB person present to respond to it could be perceived to be unchallenged homophobia.
- **Drama:** the greatest need with respect to this genre was for authenticity in reflecting both LGB and heterosexual audiences' views and lives.
- **Factual:** the factual genre demanded attention be paid to authenticity cues and was the genre in which it was felt broadcasters could leverage both incidental and overt portrayal of LGB people.
- **Children's:** this was difficult in terms of the portrayal of LGB people and proved to be a genre likely to meet with the most resistance if LGB people were to feature prominently, especially for uncomfortable heterosexual people.
- **News & Current Affairs:** the particular issues in this respect centred on the need for careful and consistent use of language, tone and context-setting, to ensure impartiality and avoid negative inference.
- **Sport:** there were low expectations in terms of the portrayal of LGB people in the context of sport but language was still all important when it came to referencing LGB presenters, sportspersons or their partners.

##### **Media platform was another factor which shaped audience expectations when it came to the portrayal of LGB people**

Whilst genre needs tended to exert greater impact, discussions in the qualitative groups revealed that the media platform on which that content was delivered was also important in shaping context and setting audience expectations.

- **TV:** was important and instrumental in shaping overall perceptions of the amount and quality of portrayal. This was especially the case given the visual potency of this medium. While visuals were highly significant in

providing landmark content for LGB people, uncomfortable heterosexual people in the qualitative research sought to avoid visuals of LGB people, particularly intimacy between them. In the content examples they were given ahead of the qualitative research, for example, they found the portrayal of LGB people 'easier' to consume via radio and online.

- **Radio:** whilst lacking the visual potency of TV, language was more exposed in the portrayal of LGB people on the radio. This was felt to be more at the discretion of presenters and contributors, and so highlighted the importance of talent in setting tone and context. Felt to be a live and spontaneous medium, audiences gave the portrayal of LGB people more leeway on radio than other media platforms.
- **Online:** this media platform was seen as self-selecting (i.e. needing to be actively sought by users). Partly as a consequence of this, the portrayal of LGB people could be highly scrutinised by audiences. Moreover, there was an expectation that particular care would be taken with online material and that it would be carefully checked and edited. As a consequence, online content deemed to be offensive could be subject to severe criticism.

### **The TV watershed allowed for greater comfort amongst heterosexual people with the overt portrayal of LGB people**

In terms of scheduling, the quantitative study showed a correlation between time slot and levels of comfort. Respondents were given a range of scenarios of portrayal of LGB people on broadcast media and asked to report their comfort levels with them. Overall, for most of the scenarios, more respondents were comfortable than uncomfortable with the scenarios in question.

Looking at the TV scenarios for before 9pm, heterosexual people were generally more comfortable with incidental portrayal (for example, a gay, lesbian or bisexual presenter on a sports programme) than they were with more overt portrayal of LGB people (such as a gay couple discussing their relationship in a documentary).

Looking at the TV scenarios for after 9pm, the watershed did have an impact on comfort levels, adding an additional 10%+ of people saying they were comfortable with portrayal. However, the pattern was generally the same as with the pre-watershed scenarios, with greater comfort with incidental portrayal than with overt portrayal.

In the qualitative research, the scheduling of the portrayal of LGB people was of most concern to parents, especially if they belonged to the group of those uncomfortable with LGB portrayal.

## **Authenticity was critical as a driver of credibility and engagement with the portrayal of LGB people**

During the qualitative groups it became evident that the perceived authenticity of the portrayal of LGB people was vital in terms of engaging audiences with that content and validating it. This, in turn, determined perceptions of the quality of that portrayal. Authenticity was generally defined as 'feeling' real and true to life. However, as outlined earlier, people's personal experiences and social contexts varied, and so what was authentic to some was harder for others to believe.

This is not to say that stereotyping within the portrayal of LGB people could not play a role for audiences, particularly in the area of humour. Indeed, for some uncomfortable heterosexual people in the qualitative groups, stereotypes were necessary for clearly signalling LGB characters or people and helped them to find points of reference in the portrayal. For LGB and comfortable heterosexual people, stereotypical representations of LGB people needed to be offset by more authentic portrayal.

## **Incidental portrayal, overt portrayal and landmark moments of LGB portrayal have roles to play for different audiences**

From a qualitative perspective, it was evident that incidental and overt portrayal had different, yet equally important, roles to play for different audiences.

While more uncomfortable heterosexual people were more comfortable with incidental portrayal on the one hand, and LGB people were welcoming of it, LGB people were also clearly in need of more content showing overt portrayal and also expressed a hunger for landmark content. They did, however, keep in mind the relative appropriateness of that LGB portrayal within genre, channel or network, media platform and schedule or time slot.

## **Audiences wanted humour within the portrayal of LGB people to be given wide parameters**

During the qualitative discussions it became clear that all audiences wanted there to be broad licence for humour, on the understanding that who makes the joke was crucial. The coming out process, however, was felt to be 'off limits' for comedy, given that it is such a potentially challenging and difficult experience.

## **Taboos in the portrayal of LGB people differed according to different audiences**

Despite wanting wide licence for humour, the qualitative study discussed did raise some absolute taboos when it came to the portrayal of LGB people. In particular, LGB people felt that unchallenged homophobia was unacceptable, while the most uncomfortable heterosexual people felt that sexual content and intimacy was taboo.

## **LGB people could be highly sensitive to language and tone in LGB portrayal**

Humour aside, LGB people in the qualitative groups could be highly sensitive to language and tone across all genres and media platforms, ranging from entertainment on TV to online news reporting.

## **LGB people wanted to see LGB talent who are open about their sexual orientation but don't necessarily make reference to it**

Broadcasting talent who were open about being LGB played an incredibly important role for those LGB people in the qualitative research who were not yet out or recently out. These groups were also the most sensitive audience when it came to stereotyping in portrayal and sought a more diverse range of talent than stereotypes of the past have been able to offer. Essentially, they would like to see talent who are open about their sexual orientation, but don't necessarily make reference to it.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that for LGB people, if talent who were LGB did not make their sexual orientation known at all or if the subject of their sexual orientation was never raised, this was not seen to really qualify as portrayal of LGB people.

## **5. Thoughts on the BBC and the portrayal of LGB people**

### **The BBC fares relatively well with its portrayal of LGB people but there is more to be done**

Overall, the portrayal of LGB people by the BBC compares relatively well with other broadcasters; behind Channel 4 but ahead of the other main broadcasters. However, portrayal which causes offence can quickly challenge views of the BBC.

37% of the LGB sample rated the BBC's portrayal of LGB people as good or very good. However, 24% of the LGB sample rated it as poor, a figure which tended to be driven by the lesbian sample.

When it came to quantitatively measuring the BBC's portrayal of LGB people against a variety of descriptors (stereotyped, realistic, outdated and ground-breaking), there were mixed views amongst the LGB sample. The apparent contradictions in the examples that follow reflect the different life experiences within the LGB sample as well as the different content to which they have been exposed, reinforcing the reality that LGB communities are not homogeneous.

Indeed, 44% of LGB people agreed that the BBC's portrayal of LGB people was realistic, yet 37% agreed that it was stereotyped. And for instance, 27% of the LGB sample agreed that the BBC's portrayal of LGB people was outdated while 23% agreed that it was ground-breaking.

Those who rated the BBC positively in the quantitative research said they felt its portrayal of LGB people was presented in a balanced, honest and fair way. They also commented that the BBC does not stereotype LGB people and that its content reflected real life. Finally, they felt that there was a lot of LGB coverage on the BBC. The views reflected those expressed in the qualitative groups, where the BBC was felt to perform relatively well, both in terms of volume and quality of LGB portrayal.

Respondents in the LGB sample who rated the BBC as poor in its portrayal of LGB people said they did so because there wasn't enough and what there was, was too stereotypical or did not reflect true life. This lack of consensus illustrates the diversity of life experiences, needs and viewing preferences amongst the LGB sample.

Certainly in the qualitative research the groups of LGB people felt that there was still more that the BBC could do, and, as licence fee payers, they said they would value it if the landmark moments they hungered for were on the BBC. They expressed a desire for the BBC to have a more cohesive approach to its portrayal of LGB people, demonstrating a commitment to a more integrated, realistic way of portraying LGB people which could accommodate uncomfortable attitudes and better reflect LGB people across content.

### **Heterosexual people had less opinion on the BBC's portrayal of LGB people**

In the quantitative study, heterosexual people had less of an opinion regarding the BBC's output of LGB people than the LGB sample. 29%

answered that they did not know what they thought of it and 34% said they thought it was neither good nor bad. There were differences by demographics within this, with the heterosexual men being more neutral than heterosexual women who were more inclined to rate the BBC's LGB content positively. There were also particularly high levels of 'don't know' amongst the over 55s. However, it is worth noting that 31% of heterosexual respondents said that BBC portrayal was good, while 6% said it was poor.

When asked to what extent they felt that the BBC's portrayal of LGB people was stereotyped, outdated, realistic or ground-breaking, the heterosexual sample was again less likely to have an opinion than the LGB sample. This was also true when rating the output of the other broadcasters.

Reasons given by heterosexual people for rating the BBC's LGB portrayal as good in the quantitative survey included comments to the effect that it helped raise awareness of LGB issues and educated people and that it was presented in a balanced, honest and fair way.

Heterosexual people who rated the BBC's output of LGB people as poor were primarily concerned with the fact that there was too much of it and it should not be allowed. This confirms findings from the qualitative study, in which uncomfortable heterosexual people were keen for the BBC to take a more gentle approach to the portrayal of LGB people.

### **Channel 4 seen by LGB people as leading the field in LGB portrayal**

In the quantitative data, there was no difference in perceptions of BBC and Channel 4 amongst the heterosexual sample. In fact, they perceived the BBC's LGB content in line with both that of Channel 4 and ITV.

However, Channel 4 was seen to be leading the field by the LGB sample, gay men in particular; 44% of the LGB sample (and within this, 52% of the gay sample) described Channel 4's LGB output as quite or very good compared to 37% and 43% respectively for the BBC.

When it came to the descriptors, Channel 4's content featuring LGB people was more likely to be described as ground-breaking by the LGB sample (37%) compared to that of the BBC (23%). Again, this was primarily driven by the gay male sample, 44% of who agreed Channel 4's portrayal of LGB people was ground-breaking, compared to 37% of the lesbian sample and 34% of the bisexual sample. Channel 4's content was also less likely to be described as stereotyped by the LGB sample, only 27% agreed that it was stereotyped compared to 37% for the BBC.

## 6. Suggestions from the research for the way forward

In terms of ways forward, the research findings pointed to the following for the BBC:

- An editorial commitment from the BBC to better reflect the diversity of LGB people, tailored by genre. Importantly, from both the qualitative and quantitative research and from suggested improvements from heterosexual and LGB samples alike, there was a call for more realistic, less sensationalised coverage and fewer stereotypes.
- Integrating the 'worlds' of heterosexual and LGB people, so that sexual orientation is less a topic to cover and more an identity to reflect in the mix. It was clear in the research that people did not want a person's sexual orientation to always be the main focus within content involving LGB characters or people.
- Making the most of creative opportunities in:

a) incidental LGB portrayal across all genres, fairly representing and reflecting the full and varied everyday lives of LGB people

b) overt and/or landmark content tailored to people who are hungry for more portrayal of LGB people, and for that to sometimes be challenging and iconic

- Flagging up forthcoming portrayal featuring LGB people and leveraging media and communications opportunities in order to endorse that portrayal. This would be with a view to attracting awareness and engagement of LGB people, particularly for those who are not out at all in terms of their sexual orientation, to help them find and connect with it.

Amplifying the BBC's portrayal of LGB people in this way would also show a level of confidence in and commitment to LGB portrayal. At the same time, however, it would take into account the needs and sensibilities of people uncomfortable with the portrayal of LGB people.

## **Executive Summary – Analysis of Public Consultation on the BBC’s Portrayal of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences**

### **Representation**

#### **Question 1: How important is it to you that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are reflected on television, radio and the internet?**

There was overwhelming support for the principle of reflecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people across BBC services. Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) consultation respondents were more likely to think that reflection of LGB people was important. Female respondents were most likely to voice the importance of reflection of LGB people on air and on screen. Younger people were also much stronger in their views on this compared with older respondents.

For many consultation respondents, the importance of realistic and non-stereotypical portrayal was inextricably connected to, and as important as, the reflection itself. Therefore a higher volume of stereotypical portrayal of LGB people could be potentially damaging compared with greater portrayal felt to be more authentic.

The views of a minority of respondents who perceived the portrayal of LGB people as unimportant, correlated with their views of LGB sexual orientations more broadly. Many of these consultation respondents had a different perception about the amount of portrayal of LGB people in the media – often viewing it as disproportionate to their perceived size of the LGB population.

### **Expectations of the BBC**

**There are a variety of ways that the media affects the attitudes that people have towards those who are perhaps different to themselves.**

**For example, some people may not know anyone who happens to be lesbian, gay or bisexual and the only time they may see or hear about them could be through broadcast media.**

**Question 2: Do you think the BBC has a responsibility to try and help challenge perceptions that may exist about lesbian, gay and bisexual people? If so, how?**

Overall, half of all consultation responses to this question stated that the BBC does have a distinct role in challenging perceptions about LGB people.

Responses from LGB respondents were much more likely to state that the BBC does have a responsibility here. While only a third of heterosexual respondents thought that this was the case, more than twice as many LGB respondents thought this was important.

A third of consultation respondents felt that the BBC has no role in this respect. A further 17% of respondents answered instead by pointing to the BBC's role, as they saw it, to reflect life's reality.

**Question 3: Thinking about when you may have seen or heard lesbian, gay and bisexual people or characters on the BBC, how would you describe the overall view that is portrayed of them? Is it negative or positive or mixed?**

Overall, respondents were most likely to describe the BBC's portrayal of LGB people as mixed with a third of both LGB and heterosexual respondents holding this view. Heterosexual respondents were more likely to think the BBC's portrayal of LGB people was positive compared with LGB respondents. Half of LGB respondents thought that BBC portrayal of LGB people was either negative or stereotypical compared with just under a third of heterosexual respondents.

### **Range of Portrayal Across Genres**

**People can be portrayed in broadcast media in many different types of programmes, such as in news stories, documentaries and chat shows, and also as characters in fictional programmes such as comedy and drama.**

Thinking specifically about programmes you may have seen or heard on the BBC:

**Question 4: Do you think the BBC broadcasts enough programmes that include stories about lesbian, gay or bisexual people, or characters, presenters or contributors who are lesbian, gay or bisexual?**

The vast majority of respondents thought that there is insufficient portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people across the BBC with 70% of respondents holding this view.

Heterosexual respondents were less likely to hold this view on the volume of the BBC's portrayal of LGB people in comparison with LGB consultation

respondents. Lesbian respondents were most likely to think that there is insufficient coverage with more than double the proportion of lesbian respondents stating the same view compared with heterosexual respondents.

Just over one in 10 responses to this question reported that they thought there was an overrepresentation of LGB people reflected by BBC services.

Consultation respondents' perspectives on the quantity of portrayal were often necessarily bound to their views on the quality of that portrayal. For these respondents, quality and quantity of portrayal were inextricably linked, where the way LGB people were portrayed was as, if not more, important, as the amount of portrayal of LGB people.

### **Question 5: Do you think that some types of programmes do this better than other types?**

There were very mixed views across responses to this question. Half of consultation respondents thought that there were programme genres which performed better in this area and the other half held the opposing viewpoint.

The programme genres mentioned most frequently by respondents were drama (including continuing drama), comedy and entertainment and factual programming.

Overall, across these areas, consultation respondents thought that drama, rather than continuing drama, held more scope for realistic and accurate portrayal of LGB people. While consultation respondents felt there was a greater volume of portrayal of LGB people through comedy and entertainment, respondents were concerned with its stereotypical nature. Consultation respondents' commentary on factual programming was that while its quality was good, there was too little of it.

### **Question 6: Do you think some broadcasters do this better than others?**

Unlike other questions across the consultation, there was a distinct difference in the views between heterosexual and LGB consultation respondents in response to this question.

There was a range of responses to this question with commentary relating to both the quantity and quality of portrayal of LGB people. Heterosexual respondents saw no difference in performance on the portrayal of LGB people across other broadcasters, relating to both quantity and quality. Whereas the

majority of LGB consultation respondents thought there were better performers in this area.

Among those consultation respondents who did think that there were better performers, three out of four pointed to Channel 4. There was also a perceived hierarchy for those consultation respondents with Channel 4 at the top, followed by the BBC and then ITV, Five and Sky.

### **Question 7: What do you think about the portrayal of lesbian, gay and lesbian people on our news coverage?**

Almost 70% of consultation respondents thought the BBC's portrayal of LGB people through its news services is good. Heterosexual respondents were more likely to think portrayal of LGB people through news services was good. More than half of LGB respondents held the same view. However a third of respondents describe the BBC's portrayal of LGB people through its news services as poor. Lesbian respondents were most likely to be critical.

### **Authentic Portrayal**

Thinking about its portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people across radio, television and online:

### **Question 8: How well do you think the BBC does this?**

Overall four out of 10 consultation respondents thought the BBC portrays LGB people well through its output. However, heterosexual consultation respondents were more likely to think so when compared with LGB respondents. A further four out of 10 consultation respondents described the BBC's portrayal of LGB people as fair.

Just under a fifth of respondents thought that the BBC does this badly. LGB consultation respondents were slightly more likely to describe BBC portrayal of LGB people in this way.

Even where respondents thought the BBC does well, they also thought it could do better and portray LGB people in a less stereotypical way.

It was clear from responses to this question that those taking part in the consultation often had difficulty in recalling BBC portrayal of LGB people.

**Question 9: Do you think that the way the BBC portrays these people in programmes is different for each of these individual groups: gay men, lesbians, bisexual men or bisexual women?**

The majority of consultation respondents overall identified differences between how lesbians, gay and bisexual people are portrayed. Female respondents were far more likely to report the greater amount of male versus female representation in this context.

A distinct hierarchy was repeatedly articulated by consultation respondents. Gay men were perceived overwhelmingly as having greater prominence across the BBC's output, followed by a severe lack of visibility of lesbian women with bisexual people considered as largely invisible.

Linked to the concerns raised about this hierarchy in the volume of portrayal of lesbian women compared with gay men and with bisexual people, was the perceived tendency for stereotyping. Concerns that there was a distinct lack of portrayal of lesbian women was frequently reported together with concerns that lesbian experience was presented as either a temporary phase or as titillation. Similarly, dissatisfaction that bisexual people are invisible across the BBC's output were also reported together with concerns that bisexual identity was too often portrayed as a behaviour and not a valid sexual orientation.

### **Editorial Standards**

**The BBC is committed to delivering the highest editorial and ethical standards in its programmes and services.**

**Part of the BBC's commitment is to ensure that it avoids offensive or stereotypical assumptions about people and that any descriptions about people or groups of people have a good reason to be included.**

**Question 10: What do you think about the language used by the BBC when it talks about lesbian, gay or bisexual people in its programmes? Is it appropriate?**

Overall, the vast majority of consultation respondents think that the language the BBC uses when talking about LGB people is appropriate. Heterosexual respondents were much less likely to have any complaints with language the BBC uses in this area. LGB consultation respondents were more likely to think the BBC's use of language was inappropriate.

The most common examples of inappropriate language pointed to by consultation respondents were:

- Pejorative use of the word 'gay'
- Use of the word 'homosexual'
- Comments perceived to be homophobic made by BBC on screen and on-air presenters

There was also a commonly reported concern that there were no consequences to this type of behaviour on-air.

## **Consultation Respondents' Recommendations and Suggestions**

### **Question 11: What improvements, do you think the BBC could make in its portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people?**

Consultation respondents were prompted to reiterate some of the key themes already set out across the consultation, including appeals for:

- Less stereotypical portrayal
- More portrayal of LGB people
- More portrayal of LGB people integrated across all programme genres
- Portrayal of a greater diversity of LGB people
- Zero tolerance on language and homophobia
- Greater variety of LGB role models across BBC services

Just under 70% of consultation respondents who responded to this question called for less stereotypical portrayal. More portrayal of LGB people was the second most requested recommendation.

## **Other Issues**

### **Question 12: Is there anything else you want to tell us about the portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people on the BBC?**

The vast majority of consultation respondents who answered this question had no further comments to make. However, of those that did, the most significant issue raised was portrayal of trans people. This concern was also raised throughout the consultation.

The BBC Working Group on the Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences had decided that its terms of reference would not include the portrayal of trans people. There were consultation respondents who took the same view. However, there were also consultation respondents who felt strongly that while the experiences of both LGB and trans people are distinctly different; their common experience of discrimination over time justified their inclusion in the scope of this work. Those respondents disagreed strongly with the decision not to look at both experiences in tandem. 384 consultation respondents identified as transgender giving the BBC a significant resource of what a considerable number of trans people think about its portrayal of LGB people, and potentially of trans people. The BBC can use this further to inform any future work on the portrayal of trans people.

Other issues raised by consultation respondents were looking to Channel 4's experience and for the BBC to keep up its good work.

## **Appendix 1**

### **BBC Working Group on Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Audiences**

#### **Terms of Reference**

##### **Purpose**

The BBC Working Group on Portrayal and Inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Audiences is a task oriented team made up of staff from across the organisation set up to identify opportunities to enhance creativity and audience engagement, by considering current editorial policy and practice, and improving portrayal of lesbian, gay and bisexual people (LGB).

The Working Group has been set up to advise the Diversity Board and provide it with recommendations on how the BBC can meet its aspirations under both its diversity strategy and the public purposes in relation to LGB audiences.

The Working Group will work with colleagues internally and with Stonewall and other LGB community partners as and when appropriate, to identify and share examples of good practice to inform solutions for further improvement.

## **Aim**

To enhance the BBC's creative output and fulfil its key public purpose: representing the nations, regions and communities which states that the BBC should:

- “portray and celebrate the range of cultures and communities across the UK
- provide a range of output, including original content, designed to meet the needs of the nations, regions and communities of the UK
- provide engaging output that gives an accurate picture of the many communities that make up the UK and that informs understanding and stimulates discussion about their concerns”

## **Objectives**

- To advise Diversity Board via a report with a set of recommendations identifying solutions to inform commissioning, scheduling and programme makers in general

## **Portrayal**

- To help improve the portrayal of LGB people in output, in line with the BBC's overall diversity strategy
- Identify ways to promote accurate, incidental inclusion within BBC content
- Identify existing good practice and identify ways to share this information more widely internally and externally
- Consider commissioning genre-specific content analysis to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement
- Identify ways to monitor portrayal of LGB people routinely
- Identify how the BBC can promote more LGB writers as part of developing more accurate and authentic content.

## **Audience engagement**

- Consider commissioning audience research with all audiences, including LGB people, to understand their perceptions and experiences
- Identify ways to measure the views of LGB audiences routinely

## **Communications and complaints**

- Review and monitor specialist media to identify relevant commentary and concerns
- Develop a coherent story about the BBC's approach and its commitments targeted at LGB audiences
- Review the organisation's approach to responding to editorial complaints – including how the organisation reaches a line to take – and identify any recommendations

## **Co-ordination**

- Complement and co-ordinate with work ongoing to improve employment practice and through the BBC-wide diversity action planning process

## **Expected Outcomes**

- A report to Diversity Board with a set of recommendations
- Possible policy document for programme makers
- Possible content analysis
- Possible audience research

## **Working with LGBT Communities**

While principally an internal group, the Working Group will work with external partners including Stonewall and other organisations inviting their views at key points during the Group's work to inform its approach.

## **Accountability**

- Tim Davie is the Executive Board Sponsor for the Working Group
- The Working Group will be facilitated and supported by the Diversity Centre
- The Working Group will report their findings and recommendations to the Diversity Board
- The Working Group's progress will be reported to the BBC Trust through the annual report on implementation of the diversity strategy in October.