



LGBT participation

Inclusive or separate - or both?

'Why does there need to be a Gay Games if we're all trying to be more inclusive?' This was a common reaction to the RYA's social media coverage of the GB sailing team that won a silver medal at this summer's Gay Games; a four-yearly international event bringing together teams from more than 90 countries.

At a time when gay marriage and same-sex couples are accepted, and well-known people are open about their sexuality, it's easy to forget how different things were until relatively recently. Homosexuality was illegal in the UK until 1967, and in our Armed

Forces until 2000, and it takes longer to change attitudes than to change the law. Many gay people, of all ages, still experience discrimination. There are very few openly gay athletes or coaches.

In research, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) people cite their poor experience of school sports, including changing room 'banter' that went unchallenged, as a reason for not participating as adults. Research undertaken in 2016 found that 55% of LGBT men and 56% of LGBT women were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 33%

of men and 45% of women in the general population.

Government and Sports Council strategies aim to improve the nation's health by tackling inactivity and giving everyone an opportunity to take part in sport or physical activity. Stonewall, the campaigning organisation for LGBT rights, launched a new sport strategy in September with a mission to 'create safe sporting environments for LGBT people to develop lifelong engagement in sport' and 'utilise the power of sport to influence positive social change'.

The RYA's Strategic Plan highlights our commitment to increasing not only the number of participants, but also diversity, in all types of boating. We have made good progress in putting our core value of inclusivity into practice. Examples are the Sailability programme, partnerships in the Midlands to promote participation by young people from minority ethnic and religious backgrounds, guidance for clubs on welcoming transgender members, and initiatives to encourage more women and younger people to get involved in officiating, instructing, coaching and volunteering.

Our equality-monitoring surveys of RYA members, coaches, officials and other groups have shown an increase in LGBT participation over the past three years (or possibly a greater willingness to respond honestly to anonymous surveys),

but the data still indicates under-representation in some areas.

Whilst a person's sexual orientation shouldn't have any impact on their ability to take part in boating, some people feel more comfortable spending their leisure time in a group with similar interests and shared life experiences – for example, Sailability clubs, Women on Water, Men's Sheds, the Forces' veterans' associations, and the WI. There is room for both inclusive clubs that are open to everyone, and separate groups that provide a safe environment for those who want it.

We have an affiliated 'virtual' club, the Sailing & Cruising Association, which was set up in the early 1980s for LGBT people and their friends. Although half of their members also belong to other clubs, they enjoy meeting up because they can get on with their sailing and powerboating without having to explain their sexuality every time they meet a new club member. Their community sports project 'Out Sailing' provides opportunities for vulnerable, young LGBT people.

Trying a new activity or joining a new club can be daunting for anyone. Clubs and centres should aim to provide great first experiences and a welcoming environment for new participants and members – demonstrating through their promotional materials and actions that they are open to anyone and will not tolerate discrimination.