



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

# Sexual Orientation Research Phase 2: The Future of LGBT Research – Perspectives of Community Organisations

Social Justice



**SEXUAL ORIENTATION RESEARCH PHASE 2:  
THE FUTURE OF LGBT RESEARCH –  
PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNITY  
ORGANISATIONS**

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**National Centre for Social Research**

**Scottish Executive Social Research  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Executive recognises the importance of having appropriate information on different equality groups to support, inform and monitor progress towards the equality objectives set out in the Equality Strategy. The provision of disaggregated statistics and targeted qualitative research is already underway for many equality groups, such as those concerned with gender and ethnicity. However, it has been recognised within the Executive that existing data sources do not provide adequate information on sexual orientation per se, or on the characteristics, needs and circumstances of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities more broadly. Moreover, there is a lack of clarity within the Executive, and elsewhere, about what data needs exist in the Scottish Executive and which methods would be most effective in providing data on LGBT communities. For this reason, the Executive has commissioned this, and related studies, which aim to explore the need for, and possible approaches to, researching LGBT communities.

This document reports on qualitative research carried out with representatives of LGBT organisations in Scotland. Nine group discussions were held with a variety of LGBT organisations by the *National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)* in November and December 2001. The discussions were held in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness – but drew people from a much broader set of locations both within and outwith the central belt. 41 of the approximately 80 LGBT organisations extant in Scotland attended.

The discussions focused on three main objectives – to identify policy areas where LGBT research is considered lacking, to understand the types of research needed on these topics and to elucidate the barriers to research on LGBT issues in Scotland, as well as their solutions. A companion review of data sources and research on LGBT issues has also been conducted by *NatCen* on behalf of the Executive and this is published on the Social Research website ([www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch)).

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY ON LGBT ISSUES

Since its inception, the Executive has made considerable headway into thinking about how policy needs to be more inclusive of LGBT people. Documents like the Equality Strategy, and events such as the thematic seminars on LGBT issues, where Ministers and civil servants have listened attentively to community concerns exemplify this. In addition, National LGBT organisations have clearly been involved in lobbying and briefing the Executive and the Scottish Parliament about LGBT matters. This consultation with LGBT organisations adds a further level of depth to those issues already known to the Executive and, hopefully, has unearthed other concerns that have not been voiced before in any previous forum.

The organisational representatives have echoed and applauded the Executive's commitment to equality and inclusion set down in the Equality Strategy. In carrying this forward, discussions with community organisations have generated a plethora of specific concerns – across a wide range of policy areas. Issues such as homophobic bullying (in schools or in the workplace), the education of children on prejudice and discrimination and the importance of partnership rights to LGBT people – in addition to many others - call for policy change in specific areas of government. However, the study has also highlighted a set of broader policy

issues, responsibility for which lies in no single area. These include the introduction of full equality in all aspects of law; the extension of social inclusion measures to address the concerns of LGBT people and the reform of public services to take full account of the needs and requirements of LGBT people. Other broader fundamental issues have also been put on the map – the importance of support for rural LGBT individuals and communities, and increased funding for LGBT community infrastructure throughout Scotland. These issues demonstrate LGBT people’s wish for more fundamental change in the way that policy is made.

### **3. CREATING A RESEARCH AGENDA**

This consultation with LGBT organisations has generated a broad and detailed research agenda that relates to the many domains of public policy, including education, health, criminal justice and employment. The topics suggested clearly underpin the broader aspiration for policy change in these areas, however, some notable policy issues are absent from the research agenda. These concern matters where, it was felt, that policy change was more important than research. They relate to issues deemed central to the civil rights of LGBT people in Scotland: the right to be free from discrimination; safety from harassment and violence; and the ability to form partnerships and families – and to enjoy their concomitant benefits. However, there is also a view that some research may be needed on such issues to inform and facilitate change.

The research agenda generated communicates an overriding thirst for knowledge about LGBT life, experiences and circumstances. This is not merely to advance intellectual learning but is rooted in a need for validation of LGBT existence. Organisational representatives have emphasised that, while there are some uncharted areas of LGBT life, there is also considerable knowledge of LGBT existence in Scotland. However, research is seen as an important way of providing irrefutable evidence or proof to convince policy makers, funders and service providers why change is needed and how it should happen. Other values of research were also underscored – its role in community development, for example, and its contribution to the activities of support organisations. In this sense, the involvement of community organisations in the creation of a research agenda for LGBT issues was clearly valued by organisations and crucial to creating a more grounded and all encompassing programme of work.

### **4. RESEARCH METHODS**

The discussion of research methodologies with organisational representatives highlights the value of a pluralist approach. While quantitative data was seen as having greater legitimacy in the eyes of funders and policy makers, there was also a strong belief in the ability of qualitative approaches to tell the story of LGBT experience and circumstance more effectively. There was also concern voiced about the quality and competence of existing research (seen in part to arise from the limited resources to carry out robust enquiries and difficulties in reaching a representative sample of LGBT people). Consequently, there was considerable emphasis placed on the need for validity and reliability in any future research enquiries.

The issue of who was best placed to conduct research on LGBT issues was a source of much discussion. Despite opposing views about whether researchers should be indigenous to the communities or from outwith, there was consensus on the qualities required of a researcher or research organisation. In this sense, the importance of independence, objectivity and

sensitivity were emphasised. Such issues are similar to those raised by other equality groups – such as disabled people and minority ethnic populations – and there has been in the past twenty years a greater acknowledgement within policy research of the centrality of the community researcher. Future researchers clearly need to understand that in the same manner as it is important to meet the language or access needs of a respondent, it is important for any researchers on LGBT issues to have a keen grasp of LGBT culture and to adapt their research methodologies in response to this.

Enhancing the participation of LGBT people in research was also seen to be an issue of key importance. A number of barriers were highlighted by representatives – perhaps the most important being the difficulty in accessing all LGBT people in Scotland and developing representative survey samples. Here, it was argued that homophobia/transphobia and a legacy of exclusion – matters at the core of any policy development on LGBT issues – were significant challenges to research that might inform such policy development. Thus, the difficulty of capturing the entire LGBT experience was seen as jeopardising the conduct of robust research. Representatives did signpost a number of strategies for overcoming this, including the need for more effective communication of the confidentiality, guaranteeing anonymity in any future research and providing better evidence that research can and does influence policy.

## **5. CO-ORDINATING RESEARCH**

Organisational representatives pinpointed the need for better co-ordination of existing and future LGBT research in Scotland. This was emphasised in two ways. First the commissioning of research is one area that was felt could benefit from a more harmonised approach. There was great emphasis placed on the Executive as the body best placed to take on this position. There was, too, seen to be a key role for LGBT organisations in informing this role, developing research priorities and being involved in both advising and conducting LGBT research. However, representatives were not oblivious to the challenges that any body commissioning research on LGBT issues would encounter – which were seen to have their base in prejudice, homophobia, invisibility and limited political support.

The second area of co-ordination envisaged concerned the dissemination of research on LGBT issues. There was felt to be insufficient access to research on LGBT issues, even to the paucity of Scottish research currently in existence. The importance of having a central point of contact for community organisations, service providers, funders, and policy makers was recurrently underscored. It was hoped that better dissemination of research findings would lead to more enlightened policy and practice and a more informed general public, which ultimately – it was hoped – could challenge stereotypes and change public attitudes. There was no clear conclusion as to who should take on this dissemination role. While some felt that the Executive was best placed, others favoured the location of such a body within the LGBT community.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and context

Equality of opportunity is a key principle of the Scottish Parliament and a priority of the Scottish Executive. The definition of equal opportunities given in the Scotland Act (1998) is expansive and clearly includes sexual orientation. This commitment to equal opportunity for LGBT communities is expanded upon in the Equality Strategy produced by the Scottish Executive<sup>1</sup>, as well as by the other activities conducted by this Unit, such as the thematic seminars for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities held in the Summer of 2000 and Autumn of 2001.

One of the three main strategic aims identified in the Strategy is the commitment to '*making better policy and providing better services*'. In practice this commitment means that in developing policy the Executive is dedicated to making sure that '*equality issues are considered in the formulation, design and delivery of policy/legislation/services*'<sup>2</sup>. As part of this, the Executive has pledged to review processes for consultation with the different equality groups, including the LGBT communities.

To support, inform and monitor progress towards equality objectives and 'mainstreaming', the Executive recognises the importance of having appropriate information on different equality groups. The provision of disaggregated statistics and targeted qualitative research is already underway for many equality groups, such as those concerned with gender and ethnicity. However, it has been recognised within the Executive that existing data sources do not provide adequate information on sexual orientation per se, or on the characteristics, needs and circumstances of LGBT communities more broadly<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, there is a lack of clarity within the Executive, and elsewhere, about what data needs exist in the Scottish Executive and which methods would be most effective in providing data on LGBT communities. For this reason, the Executive has commissioned this, and related studies, which aim to explore the need for, and possible approaches to, researching LGBT communities.

Understanding research and data needs on LGBT issues – both within and outwith the Executive – is important and has clear benefits. Generating appropriate data on all equality groups is essential because it can lead to policy that facilitates wider equality in society. It does this by increasing awareness and '*recognition of the different positions occupied by different individuals and groups vulnerable to inequality and disadvantage within economic and social systems*'<sup>4</sup>. Only by doing this will it be possible to ensure proper monitoring of the position of LGBT people in Scotland, and to achieve policy that can guarantee their equal treatment. Having comparable data on all equality groups will also highlight the diversity of Scottish society, generate understanding of the relative status of each, how they overlap with one another, and how they fare in society relative to the majority of Scottish people.

Such a task does not come without its difficulties and these need careful consideration because it is essential that this exercise is as successful as possible. There are – as this and

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<sup>1</sup> *Equality Strategy: Working Together for Equality*, Scottish Executive 2000

<sup>2</sup> *Equality Strategy*, p.17

<sup>3</sup> *Equality in Scotland: Guide to data sources*, Scottish Executive 2000

<sup>4</sup> Barry U *Data Issues – background paper*, Equality Authority (Ireland) 2000

other research in this area will show - many issues and challenges associated with collecting and collating data on LGBT issues. There is also a palpable need to ensure that the needs, requirements and wishes of LGBT people – as well as policy makers – are encapsulated in any research programme. This study was commissioned to address these two issues and this report examines the perspectives of LGBT organisations about what the Scottish LGBT research agenda should be, and how it should be carried forward.

## 1.2 Objectives of the research

In its original conception, this research formed the second part of a three part research study. The three components as originally envisaged were:

1. An international review of existing data sources and research, focusing specifically on research methods used to gather data on LGBT communities;
2. Group discussions with representatives of LGBT organisations in Scotland;
3. Depth interviews with policy makers, researchers and academics.

The main focus of the study, then, was to explore current existence of and need for data on sexual orientation. It had five broad aims:

- to identify policy areas and specific issues where research of this type is considered lacking;
- to identify the types of research needs that exist in these policy areas;
- to pinpoint the barriers and facilitators to exploring LGBT issues through mainstream policy research in Scotland;
- to describe and critically discuss methods which have been used previously to gather data on LGBT communities internationally;
- to suggest future options for the collection of data on LGBT communities in Scotland.

It was decided that in meeting these aims, the research should draw upon the expertise of three stakeholder groups:

- **LGBT organisations** - to identify policy priorities surrounding equality and highlight gaps in current information relating to these;
- **Researchers and academics** - to discuss what data exists and whether/how data could be obtained in future; and
- **Policy makers** - to consider what information is needed to formulate inclusive policy on the issues of priority to LGBT communities.

This is a report on the consultation with LGBT organisations. The review of methodologies is reported in a separate publication<sup>5</sup>. The final component – the work with policy makers, researchers and academics – will be discussed with the project advisory group, to build on the work of the first two reports.

This stage of the research involved qualitative research with representatives of LGBT organisations in Scotland. It was carried out by the *National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)*. It concerned the first three objectives outlined above – to identify policy areas

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<sup>5</sup> McManus, S (2003) *Sexual Orientation Research Phase 1: A Review of Methodological Approaches* Scottish Executive, Edinburgh

where research is considered lacking, to identify the types of research needed on these topics and to elucidate the barriers to research on LGBT issues in Scotland, as well as their solutions. Qualitative research was of particular value given the exploratory and consultative nature of the research. The interactive probing and questioning methods allowed flexibility in the structure and content of discussions, which facilitated exploration of views and opinion in a way that was responsive to the accounts of individual representatives. This was essential for the investigative approach that the study required.

### **1.3 Sample design**

The ability to draw wider inference from qualitative research depends, to some extent, on the nature and quality of the sampling. The rationale in selecting those to be included in a sample is to ensure diversity of coverage across certain key variables rather than to compile one that is statistically representative of the wider population. Purposive sampling of this kind provides the opportunity to identify a range of factors, influences and experiences underlying the research question.

Given the relatively small number of LGBT organisations in Scotland – approximately 80 – it was decided to invite all available organisations to participate in the study. Though conscious that not every organisation would be able to attend the groups, the uniqueness of many of the organisations – either in the people it represented or the locality in which it was situated – made it difficult to design an effective purposive sample. The diversity in the achieved sample is therefore only limited in the extent to which organisations were able to attend the discussions. 41 organisations were represented across 9 group discussions. While this represents just over half of the LGBT organisations known to the Equality Network – one of Scotland’s national LGBT organisations - most constituencies are, nevertheless, broadly represented within the achieved sample – with a good balance of urban and rural perspectives from the various sub-groups existing under the LGBT banner.

The number of participants in the research, however, was in excess of 41. National or large organisations sometimes sent representatives to more than one group discussion. Equally, smaller organisations were also sometimes represented by more than one person – at times to the same discussion. This was sometimes related to an individual’s need for support or encouragement within a discursive forum – or in the case of Transgender groups – the perception that it was sometimes unsafe to travel alone. In addition, a few individuals without any official affiliation to an LGBT organisation also attended some of the groups. These included owners or managers of LGBT commercial establishments, freelance consultants or activists on LGBT issues, and researchers from the LGBT communities. Their inclusion within the sample was unforeseen, but has undoubtedly added to the richness of the data collected.

Some voices have clearly not been captured because they do not have representation in the form of a Scottish organisation, and no relevant spokesperson was identified during recruitment. For example, no organisations were identified that represent the views of disabled LGBT people in Scotland, nor the opinions of minority ethnic LGBT people. Consequently, issues pertaining to these constituencies are likely to be under-represented in this report.

A full list of all the organisations consulted in the research is included in Appendix I.

## **1.4 Recruitment**

The Equality Network was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to conduct the recruitment and organisation of the focus groups in collaboration with *NatCen*. First, a letter was sent from the Equality Network to all LGBT groups on their mailing list (approximately eighty). This explained the purpose of the study and introduced *NatCen* as the research contractor. This was then followed by a telephone call to arrange for a representative to attend one of the nine group discussions.

Recruitment of the community organisations was not an easy task. Many of the groups that were approached are without physical premises or paid staff. This can make it difficult to deal with requests to participate in research. Some groups – particularly peer support groups – meet infrequently and may not have received the invitation in time to arrange for a representative to attend the groups. In general, particularly in the cities where the groups were held, local networks, personal and professional affiliations helped to spread the word to relevant organisations and individuals – often those that were invited made sure that they passed on details of the discussion to other relevant parties. To this end, it was common for some representatives to just turn up at discussions, without any prior notification to either the Equality Network or *NatCen*.

## **1.5 Conduct of the research**

Nine group discussions were held in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness – but drew people from a much broader set of locations both within and outwith the central belt. The groups were conducted in November and December 2001.

Groups were held in the evening or during the day at weekends. They took place within meeting rooms supplied by community organisations, in hotels or other neutral meeting spaces. Groups varied considerably in size – but most contained approximately six participants. Where necessary, representatives were reimbursed of their travel expenses incurred in attending the groups.

Group discussions were exploratory and interactive in form, based on a topic guide that was developed in consultation with the advisory group. This listed the key themes to be covered, and the subtopics within each to be explored. They were all tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A copy of the topic guide used is Appendix II.

## **1.6 Data analysis**

The qualitative data was comprehensively and systematically analysed. Verbatim transcripts of the group discussions were analysed using ‘Framework’ a qualitative data analysis method, developed at *NatCen*, which uses a thematic approach to classify and interpret data. It is a systematic and transparent method of analysis that enhances the validity and reliability in interpretative findings.

Framework involves a number of stages. First, the key topics and issues that emerge from the data are identified through familiarisation with transcripts. Following this a framework of key issues is then devised. A series of thematic charts, or matrices, is set up, each one relating to a different thematic issue. The columns in each matrix represent the key sub-themes or topics whilst the rows represent individual respondents. Data from each

respondent is summarised into the appropriate cell. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or to extract text for verbatim quotation.

In this way, the data are ordered within an analytical framework that is grounded in respondents' own accounts. The charts allow the full pattern of an individual's attitudes and behaviour to be reviewed. They also display the range of views or behaviours described by respondents, and allow the accounts of different respondents, or groups of respondents, to be compared and contrasted<sup>6</sup>.

## **1.7 The structure of the report**

Throughout the report, verbatim passages from transcripts are presented. To preserve the anonymity of respondents, specific details - such as names or places - that might identify respondents, have been omitted or changed. Each quotation is assigned to either a regional or central belt group, and to the type of organisation that the person represented.

The report begins by outlining the key issues of policy and practice that were raised during group discussions. Chapter 3 develops this discussion by exploring the research priorities evident within each of these areas. Here the value of research is also discussed. The following chapter focuses upon the conduct of research (Chapter 4). Here issues concerning methodology, competency, and participation are discussed, alongside views about who is best placed to carry out research amongst LGBT communities. Chapter 5 discusses the two issues raised in relation to co-ordination of research: the commissioning of research on LGBT issues in Scotland, and the dissemination of results. The final chapter summarises the research findings and reflects on the main conclusions of the study.

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<sup>6</sup> For more detailed information about Framework see Ritchie, J & Spencer, L (1994) 'Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research'. In A. Bryman & R.G. Burgess *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, London: Routledge or Ritchie, J, Spencer, L, & O'Connor, W. 'Carrying Out Qualitative Analysis'. In *Qualitative Research Practice*, J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (eds.) (in press), London: Sage

## **2 ISSUES OF POLICY & PRACTICE**

This chapter explores the range of policy issues identified by participants in relation to LGBT communities in Scotland. Although the central purpose of the groups was to discuss research needs, a portion of the time was spent talking about policy concerns. Clearly, the two are inter-related and it was anticipated from the outset that in order to generate a better understanding of research needs, it would be necessary to discuss with organisational representatives some broader policy issues.

Within the groups, organisational representatives were presented with the range of policy issues raised at the two thematic seminars held by the Executive with Scottish LGBT organisations. This list of issues is displayed in Box 2.1. Group participants were then invited to elaborate on these issues or to identify other policy topics not already encompassed by the list displayed. The result was a great variety of responses across a diverse range of policy areas. This discussion of policy will undoubtedly have significance for most policy makers within the Executive, particularly in the light of the commitments laid down in the Equality Strategy. In their discussion of policy, organisational representatives drew a clear distinction between two sets of policy issues. The first of these encompassed quite distinct policy topics that fall clearly under the jurisdiction of specific Departments within the Executive. Other issues raised were more crosscutting in nature and would likely have salience across many Departments. These somewhat different issues are discussed in more detail in this chapter.

### **2.1 Specific policy issues**

Organisational representatives identified a broad range of specific policy issues of concern to LGBT communities. A number of these potentially encompassed all LGB & T people and related to issues such as health, employment, crime and justice, partnership and housing issues. Other issues related to particular members of the LGBT communities – such as youth or minority ethnic people – or concerned specific parts of the LGBT coalition, such as lesbian women or transgendered people. Where such distinctions were drawn, they are outlined in the discussion below.

#### **2.1.1 Education**

While homophobic bullying and violence was perceived as an issue that went beyond education itself, it was felt to be a particularly important one to address within schools since it affected the learned behaviours of children and the opinions and attitudes that they carried into maturity. It was also recognised that bullying on the basis of sexual orientation affected all children, since heterosexual children were sometimes wrongly presumed to be otherwise and also subject to such abuse. In practice terms, there was felt to be a distinct need at school level to record all instances of bullying, as a way of demonstrating the scale of the problem. The repeal of Section 2a was seen as paving the way to tackle homophobic bullying but there was some disappointment that education authorities had not been pro-active (or that education policy had not been more instructive) in combating homophobia in schools – for example by instigating education campaigns in schools and colleges.

## Box 2.1 Issues raised at thematic seminars, presented during discussions

- ❖ **Education**
  - ◆ homophobic bullying/violence
  - ◆ promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
  - ◆ education on sex and sexuality
- ❖ **Partnership Rights**
  - ◆ registration
  - ◆ adoption,
  - ◆ pensions
  - ◆ other partnership issues (e.g. property rights, inheritance)
- ❖ **Crime**
  - ◆ hate crimes
  - ◆ domestic violence/abuse
  - ◆ rape
- ❖ **Employment**
  - ◆ discrimination
- ❖ **Youth**
  - ◆ peer and other support services for LGBT youth
- ❖ **Parenting**
  - ◆ legal position of LGBT parents
  - ◆ support for LGBT parents & their children
- ❖ **Health**
  - ◆ funding for HIV services & lesbian health initiatives
  - ◆ access to primary care
  - ◆ mental health
  - ◆ alcohol and drug use
- ❖ **Transgender issues**
  - ◆ birth certification
  - ◆ marriage
- ❖ **Rural issues**
  - ◆ rural exclusion
  - ◆ development of a rural service infrastructure
- ❖ **Multiple disadvantage**
  - ◆ elder, disabled and minority ethnic LGBT issues

More broadly, it was felt that until LGBT teachers felt comfortable in being open about their sexual or gender identity, without obscuring promotion chances or attracting censure from colleagues, then it was unlikely that pupils would develop more positive attitudes towards or as LGBT people.

In general, it was felt that little had been done to ensure that sexual orientation issues were included in the curriculum since the repeal of Section 2a. Moreover, groups perceived that in signing up to notions of equality of opportunity, policy was now needed to ensure that all school-going children received education on sex, sexual orientation, discrimination & prejudice. Only when this happened, it was argued, would the principle of equality be considered foundational to the curriculum. In this vein, a strong need was voiced for inclusion and positive representation of LGBT people (as pupils and/or parents) and their families in the school curriculum. This was seen as an important step to making pupils more accepting of alternative family structures. It was also felt that seeing their life experience reflected in the school curriculum would be very affirmative for both LGBT youth and the children of LGBT parents.

### **2.1.2 Partnership**

There was much support for the introduction of some system of same sex partnership or civil marriage in Scotland. While there was debate around whether LGBT people should be able to or would even want to follow the path of civil marriage or to forge some new system of partnership (an issue beyond the remit of this report), the aim was almost unanimous: for same sex relationships to be awarded the same rights and benefits of partnership as were enjoyed by heterosexual couples.

*'I think the whole marriage issue is confused in this country because it tends to mix both civil marriage and religious marriage. Unlike France for example where there has to be a civil ceremony and if you want a religious ceremony you can have it. I mean here we kind of fudge the issue. And I would like to see a total separation that marriage as far as the state was concerned was simply a registration of your partnership. And if people wish to have a religious ceremony and those groups wish to see that as marriage that's fine, but allow everybody the same rights in law. Whether you want to call it marriage or registration of your partnership or whatever'*  
(Regional Group, LGBT Switchboard)

Legal recognition of partnership was seen as important in conferring kinship rights of partners; publicly recognising financial interdependence (with full entitlement afforded to mixed-sex couples in terms of pensions, inheritance, property and state benefits); and in permitting LGBT couples to foster and adopt. There was little support for systems of partnership which conferred no legal rights or responsibilities on either partner, though such 'unions' were seen as an important step in the right policy direction, or alternatively, of great personal significance and import.

### **2.1.3 Crime & Justice**

Of those issues raised relating to crime or justice, most were based on a perception that the Scottish legal and criminal justice system was, in the main, intolerant of LGBT individuals. This was felt to lead to considerable disparity in the way that LGBT issues were dealt with by

the police and the courts, and with how LGBT people were viewed by such authorities, when compared with how heterosexual people fared.

The prevention, reporting and prosecution of hate crimes were perceived as particularly important policy issues. Specific issues included the homophobic attitude – both real and perceived – of police authorities and how this impacted on people’s willingness to report being the victim of homophobic crime; the importance shown by police authorities to homophobic crime; and whether any record was kept of homophobic crime at a local level.

*‘[Name of bar] had its probably worst and one of very few incidents last Saturday at the club. And we were absolutely disgusted when we phoned up the police the next day, 1) to find out why they hadn’t come round the same evening to take statements whilst it was still fresh in everybody’s mind and 2) to enquire what they’d done with the yobs that were hurling bottles and abuse at our front door and customers. And we were absolutely dismayed to be told that they’d been given a warning, later to appear in front of an inspector to be told off and slapped on the wrist. And we just couldn’t believe it that that’s all that these young hooligans are going to be dealt out as a form of punishment. It was absolutely unbelievable’ (Regional Group, non-affiliated individual)*

The perception of unsympathetic and derogatory treatment by police authorities was also identified as underscoring an unwillingness by members of the LGBT communities to come to the police for assistance on other matters where their sexual orientation or gender would be discussed, for example, when they experienced violence or abuse within their domestic lives. Again, there was some belief that such crimes would not be taken seriously.

It was also suggested that although policy or the law was not always explicitly homophobic, there was considerable leeway for some laws to be interpreted or enforced in a discriminatory way. The example recurrently cited here was the prosecution (or the threat of prosecution) for breach of the peace of those of the same sex who displayed affection – such as kissing - in public.

*‘I’m not sure if it’s a policing issue but it’s not actually a legal ... it’s kind of a legal issue because it’s discrimination against LGB&T people without a specific anti gay lesbian law...[I have] a friend who got arrested for kissing his partner goodbye at the Aberdeen airport for example. They were arrested, his partner having missed his flight back to Hamburg had to pay X amount to get a new ticket and also the worry that he’s going to get a criminal record. It never got anywhere...and it never was going to but it was just used to intimidate him’ (Regional Group, LGBT Organisation)*

Fear of such negative treatment was considered widespread, even in those cities (like Edinburgh and Aberdeen) where there had been co-operation between the police authorities and the LGBT community – through the development of liaison fora.

A wide disparity was perceived in the way that alleged sexual offences were handled by police authorities. Incidents involving gay and bisexual men were seen to be treated more harshly and with greater punitive consequences, than those involving heterosexuals. Participants also believed that the policing of men selling sex to other men could be far harsher and conducted with less understanding than women selling sex to men in the same locality.

Finally, throughout the discussions, there were recurrent requests for policy or legal clarification surrounding a range of legal issues. This concerned issues such as the legal recognition of change of gender for transgendered people. For instance, on a practical level there were questions raised about how the law would advise upon which toilets a transgendered person should use. Furthermore, it was felt that current sexual offences legislation was not explicit on the status of male rape and there were repeated requests for clarification that the current law was gender neutral in the way it was prosecuted.

#### **2.1.4 Employment**

The need to combat discrimination in the workplace was recurrently mentioned, together with the wish for LGBT people to feel secure in disclosing their identities at work without it resulting in homophobia from colleagues, or of it impeding promotion possibilities. In a similar manner bullying was conceived of as an issue that pervaded in many areas of LGBT life, and as prominent in the workplace, as it is within the schoolyard. LGBT employees were seen to require legal protection from employer/colleague discrimination, something that is absent at present. Without such a legal safeguard, it was felt that LGBT individuals faced considerable insecurity in the workplace, leading some to conceal their sexual orientation from employers and colleagues, or to avoid jobs or careers that may be subject to greater moral or public scrutiny.

*'I still have a problem being out as a teacher in that... I work in one of the catholic schools in [area], I'm non catholic and I'm a gay man. And I just think that would be career suicide if I admitted that, still in this day and age. I feel like I'm leading a double life and it's so frustrating from that point of view. So I feel there's a lot needs to be done educating ... educating teachers first of all'* (Regional Group, LGBT Switchboard)

In addition, the need to ensure that LGBT issues were better represented and understood within all unions was emphasised.

#### **2.1.5 Youth**

The provision of adequate peer & related support services for LGBT youth was a topic of much discussion within the groups, fuelled both by the LGBT youth and student organisations represented but also, more generally, by other participants' personal memories of difficulty encountered during younger years. The lack of funding for such services was seen to prohibit the proper support of LGBT youth services. It was felt that LGBT youth were not seen as a priority by statutory funding agencies, particularly at local authority level. Even where funding had been awarded, it was generally viewed as short-term or one-off which made it difficult to develop sustainable provision. This reluctance was seen by some to result from a perceived discomfort among statutory agencies in addressing LGBT issues, especially where they concerned younger community members.

*'And I think there is not so much a general reluctance, I think...yeah, there's a fear there, particularly round the youth thing, because even if you had to talk about it or discuss it seriously like adults, grown up adults, because they fear they're going to get attacked by the [national newspaper], some [religious organisation]'* (Regional Group, University LGBT Organisation)

As a result, there were many examples given where LGBT youth projects survived either by voluntary effort alone, or were reliant on other budgetary ‘pots’ – such as funds allocated for HIV prevention. This issue is discussed further below.

### **2.1.6 Parenting**

There were recurrent calls for the rights of LGBT parents/co-parents to be legally enshrined and for adoption laws to be reformed to allow for full parental rights for both same-sex parents. Parental rights for LGBT people was also raised as a policy issue by those representatives who drew attention to the difficulties encountered by LGBT people in getting custody and access to children from previous heterosexual relationships. The present legal framework and social services practices were felt to be largely unsupportive of the problems faced by such parents, which it was argued led to severely disrupted relationships between able, willing parents and their children.

*‘Because there are an awful lot of queer parents who are divorced, quite often as a result of some lifestyle change they’ve undergone, and are they allowed appropriate access to children?No’* (Central Belt Group, University Staff LGBT Organisation)

There was also a perceived lack of support for parents of LGBT children and a view that more support should be channelled towards helping parents come to terms with their child’s sexual orientation or gender dysphoria<sup>7</sup>. Such support was viewed as key to assuaging difficulty amongst LGBT youth by helping to prevent family breakdown in the aftermath of coming out.

### **2.1.7 Health<sup>8</sup>**

There was strong endorsement of funding to maintain & further develop HIV prevention and treatment services. However, there was also some concern voiced that statutory budgets may decrease or cease to be ring fenced for HIV within the overall health budget. Equally, while considered necessary, it was felt that the focus on HIV should not divert attention from other areas of health for LGBT people, such as broader sexual health issues and more general health concerns. There were recurrent comments about how few services targeted lesbian and bisexual women as clients (in comparison to gay and bisexual men), as well as views which highlighted the lack of services aimed specifically at the general health needs of transgendered people. This lack of provision was believed to have its roots in the lack of research and data on LGBT health (apart from HIV) and this is discussed further in Chapter 3.

*‘I think funding is obviously a vital question in that there is a need for service and those services are having their funding stretched by saying ‘Oh, it’s a gay man’s issue, it’ll have to come out of the HIV budget’, which means a lower quality of service for something which is non-HIV related and I also means that we’re stretching to breaking point already budgets for HIV services...It’s very difficult to*

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<sup>7</sup> Gender dysphoria refers to the dissatisfaction with one's gender (masculinity or femininity) which is in conflict with one's physical sex. The term is usually restricted to those who seek medical and surgical assistance to resolve their difficulty.

<sup>8</sup> Since the groups have been conducted the Executive has established an LGBT health discussion forum. This is considering policy and may also be considering research.

*get services which are non-HIV...most funding is based around the disease rather than individual...Well woman clinics is a notable exception to that'. (Central Belt Group, National LGBT Organisation)*

Issues of mental health were seen as significant across a whole range of contexts for LGBT people (if closeted, bullied, isolated etc) and the service needs of some sectors of LGBT communities – particularly those who may not be ‘out’ – were seen as acute. However, there was concern over whether issues around sexual orientation would always be picked up within mainstream services and the professional competence or capacity of public services to deal effectively with such problems was questioned. Similarly, organisational representatives discussed alcohol and drug dependency issues amongst LGBT people and the lack of specific services to address such difficulties.

Ensuring inclusive access by LGBT people to mainstream primary care services was considered an important policy issue, in addition to recognising and meeting the specific needs of LGBT people themselves. While mainstream primary and secondary care was seen as the appropriate service provider for everybody in an inclusive society, it was also deemed to be important for tailored services to be made available to LGBT people, simply because their needs require a specific expertise which at present was felt to be absent from all but a few mainstream services. This issue is discussed in more detail below.

Concern was also raised over the policy governing the prohibition of blood donation from men who have had sexual contact with other men. These regulations were seen to be discriminatory since all members of the population are potentially at risk of HIV infection. In this respect, regulations that singled out sexual practices or lifestyles were seen to communicate intolerance of sexual orientation, rather than being guided by public health requirements.

*'One thing I'd just like to state under health was something that was raised at the last [thematic] seminar. And that was access to blood transfusion and access to being able to donate blood in services where at present anybody that's ever had sex with another man is written off for life. And that's something which just seems very old' (Regional Group, University LGBT Organisation)*

### **2.1.8 Housing**

It was felt that little was known about the housing needs of LGBT people, or about the nature and extent of homelessness among them. Furthermore, there was judged to be little willingness, competency or capacity amongst housing and homelessness services to support people whose sexual or gender identity had made them vulnerable to homelessness. The needs of young and homeless LGBT people were felt to be particularly complex, and in need of dedicated attention and training, as is apparent in this representative's argument:

*'I think training needs to be increased for housing workers because they are'nay really acknowledging how vulnerable young LGBT people are. I think that's in my experience, a lot of the young people ... and how likely they are to become homeless as a direct result of their sexuality, but how you know things like mental health problems, drug problems can be a direct result of the discrimination that they face. And I don't think there is acknowledgement of that, certainly in my experience in this area anyway' (Central Belt Group, LGBT Youth Organisation).*

### **2.1.9 Multiple disadvantage**

Though raised in the thematic seminars, issues specific to disabled, elder or minority ethnic LGBT people were not elaborated to any significant extent within the group discussions. Discussants did identify the need to ensure that policy on LGBT issues was inclusive of the full diversity inherent in those communities, but did not necessarily feel they had the requisite knowledge to be able to highlight the full range of what these issues may be.

*'I think also the multiple disadvantage – elderly, disabled ... etc ... I think they're sort of lost somewhere in the overall view of things. If we talk about GLB communities that's fine but there's also people in GLB communities that are deaf, who are in wheelchairs, who are elderly. And I think that somewhere along the line they've got lost and I think that their needs are just as important as anyone else's, they don't seem to have a focus as much' (Regional Group, Gay Men's Group )*

Their lack of specific coverage within the group discussions is perhaps unsurprising given that there were no organisations in attendance that specifically represented the views of these constituencies. Scottish minority ethnic or disabled LGBT groups had not been identified in the course of recruitment, and while representatives of organisations of older lesbians and gay men were contacted and invited, they were unable to attend.

## **2.2 Cross-cutting policy concerns**

While specific policy issues raised by organisational representatives corresponded to traditional policy areas such as 'health' or 'education', a number of policy priorities were also identified that were broader in their scope or focus. They related to multiple aspects of LGBT life. Consequently, these issues have significance across a wide range of traditional policy areas and are likely to cut across existing departmental or administrative boundaries.

The central theme running through all cross-cutting themes was the need for recognition and visibility of LGBT communities in all contexts within mainstream Scottish society. In terms of equality, representatives identified the need for the enshrinement (and 'mainstreaming') of equal rights for all LGBT community members in all facets of policy and public service provision in Scotland. In terms of social inclusion there was a perceived need to widen current understandings of the concept beyond economic definitions and be inclusive of LGBT communities in addition to other recognised equality groups (such as disabled and minority ethnic groups for instance). Lack of recognition was also implicated in the way public service provision was often unprepared to meet the unique needs of LGBT community members. In terms of funding, representatives identified how recognition by funding agencies was needed to develop and sustain LGBT community infrastructure in cities and in rural areas to raise LGBT communities' visibility as a whole. There was also felt to be some lack of acceptance of the diversity within LGBT communities by community members themselves and organisational representatives identified how the interests of both rural and Transgender groups were sometimes ill-considered in a variety of ways. These issues are discussed more fully below.

### **2.2.1 Equality**

A common theme evident in representatives' accounts was the overriding need for LGBT equality in all spheres of life (and by implication in all aspects of government policy), as illustrated above by the discussion of the need for equality in employment or civil

partnership. There was a strong sense that every facet of policy and public service provision in Scotland should enshrine the equal rights of LGBT communities and individuals. Anti-discrimination legislation was seen to be the key to ensuring this, backed up by other legislative reforms such as the introduction of incitement to hatred legislation. In the context of mainstreaming – a key commitment of the Executive’s Equality Strategy - there was a perceived need to review all legislation to ensure that the rights and interests of LGBT people were protected and respected, even in those policy areas that appeared not to be directly related to sexual or gender identity.

### **2.2.2 Social Inclusion**

The incumbent administration’s focus on facilitating greater social inclusion was generally not perceived to encompass LGBT communities. Here, ‘inclusion’ was felt to be too narrowly defined and seen to be mainly focused upon economic determinants. Even where there was a move to broaden the idea of inclusion beyond the economic, it was often seen to be limited to issues of ethnicity or gender and rarely to encompass other attributes such as sexual orientation. Here, Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) came in for particular criticism. Their focus was largely seen as limited to neighbourhood renewal, which while clearly of value, excluded the needs of communities that are more geographically dispersed – such as LGBT communities. The Social Inclusion Partnership set up in Glasgow to tackle the issues faced by minority ethnic communities was heralded as an example of how issues of discrimination and prejudice could be targeted by social inclusion measures. Indeed, there were recurrent calls for a similar SIP to support and develop LGBT community infrastructure.

*‘I’d like to see the broader topic of social inclusion actually represented. And I know it’s a bit of a catch-all and certainly within Scotland the focus isn’t only on social inclusion as being an economic issue, it’s about being an accessed participation, a citizenship issue. And that in many ways can encompass a number of areas. We talk a lot about youth, but also the needs of older LGBT people and elderly care and elderly access is something that’s featured in social inclusion but there’s no provision made if you’re elderly but not straight. So that’s social inclusion encompassing a number of issues, whether that be access to goods and services, equal participation within community initiatives, care of the elderly, social participation. Which I think whilst one can’t legislate for it there is an opportunity to promote opportunities such that people can feel socially integrated within the community in which they live’ (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation)*

In this respect, the broader policy objective of increasing social inclusion was seen as having direct relevance to LGBT communities by: increasing participation in society; creating greater access for LGBT people to community support and resources; and increasing the participation of open and out LGBT people in wider Scottish society without the fear of violence or harassment.

### **2.2.3 Public services**

As public services encompass a large number of single issue areas (such as healthcare, education and housing for instance), it is perhaps unsurprising that this policy issue was raised in a number of different contexts throughout the group discussions. While issues relating to individual public services have been explored in the previous section,

representatives also identified key issues of concern for LGBT communities in relation to public services taken as a whole.

The major policy concern through all groups was the way that attempts to recognise the diversity of the Scottish population were often limited to issues of gender, ethnicity or disability and frequently excluded LGBT communities. From this perspective, it was felt that, in the main, public services (e.g. housing, healthcare, social work, education) were ill prepared to meet the unique needs of LGBT people, in terms of either access or provision.

*'I'm still not happy to tell my GP I'm a gay man because I grew up in a generation of gay men and HIV where you would lose your life insurance, you know. I don't have that confidence that many of the public bodies are going to be necessarily as supportive or as good as they should. And I think the Executive need to be working really to sort of create a sea change of attitude to us'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Switchboard )

While mainstreaming debates are not the key focus of this report, organisational representatives placed considerable emphasis on the need to ensure equal access for LGBT people to mainstream services. Issues of training were considered of great importance, with particular importance placed upon the need to deliver LGBT-awareness training to all public sector workers (e.g. police, teachers, social workers etc). However, while mainstream services were viewed as important, participants also emphasised the need for appropriate specific services that can sometimes be better placed to meet the unique needs of LGBT people. This view often hinted at an underlying fear that the specific needs of LGBT people would be lost or not catered for within mainstream services. Furthermore, it was felt that such specific services were crucial in meeting current need because it was judged that mainstream services did not always have the policies, practices or expertise necessary to adequately meet the needs of LGBT communities.

*'Because for me the funding issue goes with mainstreaming and it looks at where we balance mainstream service provision within existing funding patterns against where the LGBT community is playing catch-up and albeit if you're gay lesbian, bisexual transgender and you go to a service provider in some senses you are A N Other punter, A N Other customer, but in other senses there are things that are unique. And if that uniqueness is not being recognised within the mainstream there needs to be an interim funding strategy to allow that to be brought back to the mainstream in the future'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation)

#### **2.2.4 Funding**

The needs of LGBT communities and organisations were believed to warrant greater recognition and attention by funders than had been exhibited thus far. This was seen to be important in developing and sustaining LGBT community infrastructure in cities and in rural areas; for capacity building within these communities; and in raising the visibility of LGBT people and communities.

Overall, there was felt to be limited central government funding of LGBT communities outside of those funds earmarked for HIV prevention and the effects of this were seen to be twofold. Firstly, it was argued that given the paucity of specific funding for LGBT concerns, communities were forced to rely on government funding channelled to LGBT community organisations to aid HIV prevention. Consequently, there were reports of how HIV funding

was sometimes used to support LGBT initiatives that were not HIV-specific in focus. This was felt to be an inappropriate, but necessary, use of these funds. Furthermore, it was seen to put considerable strain on HIV services that already had competing concerns for what was ultimately a limited budget. Secondly, the lack of sufficient funding for LGBT communities was seen to create an over-reliance on voluntary effort, which, it was argued, can lead to fatigue amongst community members and, consequently, lead to unsustainable development within LGBT communities. This was a point that was made most forcibly within the more regional group discussions.

*'What tends to happen is that there is a fragility to our community that groups start up and then they collapse. There isn't the sort of mutual support around our community. It relies too much on sustained energy from individuals and if that support isn't given back to those people then things tend to collapse'* (Regional Group, Gay Men's Group )

Funding from local authority agencies was perceived as dependent, to a large degree, on local attitudes rather than an objective standard. This was demonstrated by community services (such as switchboards) that crossed a number of local authority areas but were more likely to obtain funding in one area as opposed to the others, even though a similar need was demonstrated across both. Accordingly, there was a common perception that most LGBT concerns were, at the least, under funded.

Other funding initiatives, such as the Community Fund or the New Opportunities Fund aimed at community development, were also criticised for their lack of explicit mention of LGBT concerns within their funding criteria.

### **2.2.5 Rural issues**

Fundamentally, the experience of LGBT people outside of the central belt (essentially outside Glasgow and Edinburgh) was felt to be qualitatively different and significantly more difficult. It was argued that greater invisibility (especially in the Highlands and Islands), greater perceived homophobia within rural communities and the power of the church in rural areas made life more problematic for LGBT people, and made it difficult for any sort of community development or capacity building to occur.

*'So I think people find themselves battling with just more than these issues. It's a case of 'Well we are here, we do exist, and there are gay people in the Highlands. And we do have a voice and we do have rights.' So they find themselves battling with a multitude of different things. I think if these points came up in the central belt I truly believe that it would be ... there'd be a level of easiness if you like. Up here there's not'* (Regional Group, LGBT Youth Organisation)

*'I think that ... and I see the difference in the line of work I do anyway when I go to seminar meetings whatever, down in Glasgow and Edinburgh, there's more services available to GLB&T people in Glasgow and Edinburgh in that area. You come up north, you have not a lot compared to what they have to offer. So in some ways the area that we do live in does have an impact, it has a huge impact'* (Regional Group, LGBT Youth Organisation)

Organisational representatives from outside the central belt emphasised the importance of support for LGBT communities countrywide, rather than it being concentrated in those areas

with the largest visible population of LGBT people, such as Glasgow and Edinburgh. In this sense, the development of rural service infrastructure was seen as key. There was felt to be an urgent need for support of LGBT people in towns and cities outside the central belt, perhaps by the establishment of LGBT centres similar to those in Glasgow and Edinburgh, which could then co-ordinate outreach services to the Highlands & Islands where there may be less demand or capacity. It was also suggested that, in addition to specific service provision outside Glasgow and Edinburgh, LGBT community groups should have better access to existing local community infrastructure, such as village halls and youth resources, which would allow for greater visibility and support in rural areas.

### **2.2.6 Issues for transgendered people**

Policy issues relating to transgender people were perceived in terms of specific requirements that transgender people have such as being able to change one's gender on birth certificates and (on this basis) being able to legally marry and change details of gender on public and financial service records. However transgender issues were also considered cross-cutting of all policy areas, in as much as lesbian, gay or bisexual people had somewhat different needs and priorities across a range of policy questions.

*PI: I assume the transgendered issues here include all these other ones that ... this is just a separate one because ... you know specifically to transgendered issues.*

*Int: Yes, do you want to say a bit more about that?*

*PI: Just interested again ... you know you could say the same thing about partnership rights, adoption, you know, that's under partnership rights, but I'm assuming there's going to be that linkage there as such'*

*(Regional Group, Transgender Group )*

There was tension in some groups about locating transgender issues with lesbian, gay and bisexual concerns, though this tended only to be raised in those group discussions where transgender groups were not specifically represented. Where it was voiced, it was suggested that the inclusion of transgender issues within the lesbian, gay and bisexual agenda had not always been fully or widely debated. Here, a distinction was made between transgender concerns and lesbian, gay and bisexual issues, the former being conceived as having more to do with gender equality rather than sexual orientation, and therefore seen as having less of a relevance to lesbian, gay and bisexual policy agenda.

*PI. I think gay and lesbian things are entirely separate from that. I don't think there is...there's a false unity.*

*Int: What makes it different?*

*PI: What makes it different is because ...to a large extent that's about gender and it's about gender identity. And gay and lesbian issues are largely about sexuality'*

*(Central Belt Group, L&G Trade Union representative)*

Consequently, the service needs of transgendered people were also conceived to be, potentially, quite different.

*'I feel that there is a need for more transgender services. You know I think these are very important issues but I mean as [participant] was saying I think that the way forward is to work in partnership and to have an inclusive policy of LGBT policy. But there are many many different issues with transgender. So I don't feel so much that there's a need for separate services ... or separate organisations ... but there's a need for specialist services within organisations. They're often lumped in simply because there's nowhere else for transgender people to go. But quite often I've known transgender people in counselling and so on who don't feel they've got a tremendous amount in common with the lesbian gay bisexual community because the issues are different and they have been lumped in in the past simply because that was the most ... you know by default, because there was nowhere else'. (Regional Group, Gay Men's Organisation)*

However, there was also strong support for the inclusion of transgender issues by lesbian, gay and bisexual representatives. Here it was argued that what linked these seemingly different agendas was the common experience of discrimination and therefore transgender equality was an obvious and necessary companion to equal rights for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

*'At the time we [National LGBT organisation] were LGB and there was a desire to include Transgender in it, and I was completely against it on the basis that LGB are sexual orientation issues and transgender is a gender identity issue. And why should they all be together? And the organisation finally came down [on LGBT] and I agree with it now...that I suppose the bottom line is why not? I mean basically it's all about discrimination'. (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )*

Equally, transgendered representatives sometimes felt that the inclusion of their policy objectives within the lesbian, gay and bisexual agenda was sometimes tokenistic, rather than fully supportive or comprehensive. Furthermore, it was argued that while transgendered people faced discrimination from society at large, there could be no guarantee that transgender issues would be fully understood even within an LGB forum.

### **2.3 Establishing policy priority**

Once the full range of policy issues had been identified, group participants were asked to indicate which issues were of policy priority to LGBT communities. An attempt to establish a priority was made for two reasons. Firstly, given the limited time within the group discussions, it was hoped that the prioritised issues could be examined in greater depth for the remainder of the group, a particular focus of which would be to draw out the concomitant research needs. Secondly, it was hoped that these 'policy priorities' could be a focus for the third phase of the overall research process (as described in Chapter 1) where policymakers, academics and key researchers would be interviewed about the development of both policy and research on LGBT communities.

Given the diverse nature of the policy issues described thus far, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was considerable difficulty in ascribing priority to any one set of issues. When groups were asked to construct priority, the general view expressed was that all the policy issues outlined were of equal priority. Even where, despite reservations, group participants were

encouraged to construct some taxonomy of priority, such a broad range of policy issues were put forward that the list topics quickly came to resemble the full range policy topics outlined, as demonstrated by this extract from one of the groups:

*Int: Can I just be the devil's advocate? Cos I've just been writing down your priorities just very very scribbly ...I think I have the same list here [in the note of policy priorities], apart from one or two issues, as the list that is here on these sheets [the broad list of policy topics].*

*P1 No, all we said is youth, mental health ...*

*Int: Education, Drugs and alcohol ...*

*P1 Well that's all under health, right?*

*Int: I'm not trying to be difficult, I'm just trying to understand the nature of priority.*

*P1 So we've mentioned virtually everything that's under 'health'... we've mentioned the youth as a very important one ... well and education, so that's three off this list, and then minority [ethnic] which is ...*

*Int: We talked about transgender issues. We talked about bisexual issues. We also talked about kind of women being a priority as a kind of an under-resourced area. And we talked about older lesbian and gay men.*

*P2 I think you're right as devil's advocate. I think that there is a tendency ... it's because there's so little been done. It's part of the nature of the fact that there's a lot of work that needs to be done (Central Belt Group, F1: Bisexual Organisation; M2: University LGBT Organisation)*

Participants in all groups questioned why priority should have to be constructed at all. It was felt to be a difficult request and something that other communities in Scotland would not be asked to do. Two primary concerns were recurrently expressed. First, there was a fear that to prioritise some issues over others might lead to short term policy gains but the opportunity cost of these could be that other community needs would be ignored.

*'I kind of feel we're in a bit of an invidious position in a way in this whole process. We know there's a limited pot of money, we know we're never ever going to get everything that we'd like, and we almost have on the one hand the chance to invest for the future, to invest in capacity, to invest in knowledge, to invest in an infrastructure which we know won't give us the answer in itself but it will be providing us with a long term foundation. On the other hand we have the opportunity to pursue key policy areas, get some quicker results, get some shorter term wins' (Central Belt Group, (National LGBT organisation )*

*'Well there are priorities because you've put them on the agenda. If we're pushed then, okay, we'll come down to priorities, but the fear is for us that ...anything we don't mention as a priority will never ever be done' (Central Belt Group, Gay Men's Group)*

Secondly, attention was drawn within the groups to an obvious tension between individual, organisational and community priorities, which made it difficult to decide on what was priority. For many participants, personal priorities were seen to differ from the policy priorities of the organisation they were representing, which in turn may be different from the priorities that they consider useful or politic to the wider LGBT communities.

*'As the chief executive and service provider it would have to be the funding related issues. As an individual gay man I think partnerships rights are extremely important, as are all the other ones based on legislation like the employment rights, things like pensions and things like that. So there's a variation. But I do also think there is that point that you stressed, they're all priorities as well, because I don't think we can ever get away from that'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )

While falling short of identifying priority, certain issues were seen as foundational for LGBT communities and they tended to constitute the more crosscutting themes discussed earlier.

*'I just...maybe on the point there are some foundational things. Well in particular the issue of equal opportunities and anti-discrimination and ensuring that that really is mainstream throughout public policy. And that's kind of a foundational thing. Once you've got that then it does become easier to start addressing the more specific issues because there's a bit of a push going on'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )

Thus equality issues (such as legislative change and innovation) and funding were seen as basic structural necessities, without which it would be difficult to make any further inroads into improvement in service provision for LGBT communities. Training and education were seen as fundamental to the change in public opinion and attitudes that would preface any greater acceptance of LGBT people in Scotland, and to effect the equal treatment of LGBT people in public service contexts. However, it was not considered that any of these issues were any more or less important than others discussed and groups emphasised that priority could not be drawn up in this manner.

In overview, it is clear that focus group discussions with LGBT organisational representatives have proved an invaluable method of consulting LGBT communities on policy issues felt to be of current concern in Scotland. While representatives did not feel they were able to establish priorities from the diverse range of specific and cross-cutting policy issues identified, it was clear that establishing such a broad range of policy topics would in fact have a lot to contribute in terms of the shaping of a research agenda for LGBT communities in Scotland. The parameters of this research agenda are explored in Chapter 3.

### **3 RESEARCH PRIORITIES**

This chapter explores the research priorities identified during discussions with organisational representatives. In the main, the level of research or data available on LGBT people was considered poor. Indeed, as highlighted in Chapter One, the rationale for the current study was based on the lack of data available on LGBT communities, in comparison to other equality groups.

Broadly, representatives identified two types of research that were considered necessary for LGBT communities in Scotland. The first related to specific topics which it was felt needed some research in order to increase public understanding, to inform policy or, alternatively, to garner increased levels of resources or support and mapped, relatively neatly, onto established policy areas, such as education and health. A second, broader, collection of research needs was also highlighted. These were less clear-cut and likely to have implications beyond a single Department within the Executive. These aspirations – such as the need for research on social inclusion or attitudinal research on LGBT issues – were broad in that they related to a variety of policy areas and therefore are likely to come under the remit of several departments within the Executive. In addition, such research needs were considered foundational in that they pertained to a need for greater understanding and knowledge about the nature and scale of the LGBT population in Scotland. For ease of discussion, these are dealt with separately here. However, in practice they are perhaps more intertwined than this – broader research interests having implications for the kinds of research required on specific policy topics. Issues that were not seen to require research are also discussed in this Chapter, as are representatives' views about the value of research.

#### **3.1 Specific Research Priorities**

Organisational representatives identified a large range of specific research issues around which they had particular concerns. Some of these topics related to participants' own area of expertise, however, most specific research priorities were mentioned in some form across all group discussions. They relate to a wide variety of policy areas and are discussed in detail in this section.

##### **3.1.1 Education**

A major concern of organisational representatives was the capacity of the present education curriculum to provide a complete education on issues to do with sex and sexual orientation, even though the repeal of Section 2a had removed restrictions about discussing LGBT issues in schools. It was felt that research was needed to assess the type and quality of teaching given to school-going children on sexual orientation and on equality issues more broadly. Furthermore, it was suggested that an investigation of the training needs of teachers and other school employees in addressing issues of sexual orientation within education would be of considerable utility.

The impact of bullying and homophobia in schools was identified as having been the subject of some locally based research already, but there was a perceived need for more research on a National level.

The collection of basic statistics on the number of LGBT pupils was seen as important in validating their existence within the education system. At the most basic level, it was felt that such demographic data would demonstrate to authorities the existence of LGBT pupils and to pioneer a debate about how these young people's support needs could be addressed during school years.

### **3.1.2 Youth**

Research priorities associated with young people were closely aligned with some of the issues encompassed within education such as homophobic bullying and the need for sensitive and appropriate staff support. In addition, representatives identified how research was needed to inform key services (such as peer support projects) for LGBT youth. Of immediate concern was the absence of research on those young LGBT people no longer in education but too young to access the limited support or help available in some larger cities and towns. Representatives felt this to be closely related to another research priority – to investigate the needs of young people in the process of coming to terms with their sexual or gender identities. Such research was seen to be invaluable for informing the work of services involved in supporting LGBT youth, who it was felt were potentially subject to a host of significant vulnerabilities.

*'I think it's really important ... significant time lapse in realising your sexuality and coming out, and what happens in those years. So I think off the top of my head it was something like by the age of 16 nearly 60% of people that we interviewed and got questionnaires back from had realised that they were lesbian or gay, but only 9% had told anybody at all. And as the age went on it was like by 18 90% had realised but you know a very small portion had still come out. Now the implications of what happens in that time were enormous and we found links between those that were bullied at school, exiting school, going into low paid jobs, avoiding things like promotion because of you know not wanting to make a fuss in your job or wanting people to get to know you' (Central Belt Group, LGBT youth Organisation)*

Also identified was a need for a realistic and accurate understanding of the sexual health of LGBT youth. It was suggested that exploring young people's sexual behaviour would contribute greatly to the improvement of sexual health services, helping them to better address the needs of LGBT youth.

### **3.1.3 Parenting**

A recurrent and central theme that ran through the discussion of parenting concerned the need for representation of alternative family structures (in addition to the traditional two, different sex, parent family) throughout the education system – a point made most forcibly by representatives of lesbian and gay parenting groups. Research was needed, it was felt, to validate the definition and experience of family for children of LGBT parents and to support parents of LGBT children. In particular, representatives suggested that there was a need to quantify the presence of LGBT parents and families in Scotland, so that schools and other authorities could be made aware of their existence and concomitant service requirements.

*'...statistics, certainly for parenting would be really useful to be researched, [for] just sheer numbers. Because apart from anything else it gives weight to what we're doing...and persuading schools is important' (Regional Group, Lesbian Group)*

Other research topics mentioned in relation to parenting related to legal enquiries into the rights of a co-parent (who may not be the biological parent of a child), for example, in assuming guardianship, in adoption, or alternatively, in the event of the dissolution of any relationship they may have with the biological parent(s).

#### **3.1.4 Rural Issues**

As previously outlined, rural issues were most recurrently stressed in discussions outside Glasgow and Edinburgh, although they did feature across most focus groups. Particular importance was placed on the need to understand the nature of exclusion faced by LGBT people living in rural areas. The commissioning of even basic research on this topic was seen as an important step in understanding how the needs of LGBT people in rural areas may be different from urban dwellers. It was felt that such research would need to identify which factors play a part in rural exclusion for LGBT people (e.g. lack of physical infrastructure, social isolation from other LGBT people, stronger religious and homophobic attitudes in smaller rural communities etc). As the following rural LGBT officer outlines:

*'I mean it really depends what people take forward. It's hard to know what the main issues are. It really is, cos there are so many. Inclusion would be one of them, you know feeling part of society. But there are so many, I mean it'd be a case of kind of really teasing them out. But I would like to see more research round rural issues for GLB communities'* (Regional Group, LGBT Youth Organisation)

Towns in close proximity to larger cities were also identified as having little infrastructure as a result of being situated close to major centres such as Edinburgh and Glasgow. Consequently, it was suggested that the definition of 'rural' in any future research would need to be sufficiently broad to capture all aspects of exclusion as a result of geographical location.

#### **3.1.5 Multiple disadvantage**

Multiple disadvantage was an issue that attracted relatively less discussion than other policy areas. Consequently, there were also fewer research priorities generated. What discussion occurred underlined the paucity of research or information on the particular circumstances and experiences of older, minority ethnic and disabled members of the LGBT communities, and the need for greater understanding of their needs and circumstances.

#### **3.1.6 Issues for transgender people**

The positioning of transgender issues within the LGBT policy agenda was an issue of some debate with differing opinions evident within and between different groups. However, in all groups there was a view that very little actual research had been conducted about transgender individuals or communities within Scotland. In this respect, it was difficult to extract specific research needs from participants, since given the dearth of existing research, representatives felt that any research into aspects of transgender experiences would be an improvement on the present level.

### **3.1.7 Crime and Justice**

A key theme identified by participants was the need for recording of homophobic crime within the criminal justice system. It was believed that this would give a better understanding of the distribution of hate crime across Scotland and would identify which members of LGBT communities appeared to be the most at risk. Although it was acknowledged that recording of homophobic crime had already begun in some jurisdictions, it was felt that such recording needed to happen nation-wide in order to have any real value.

In addition, there was seen to be a need for data on how LGBT people actually fare within the criminal justice system themselves – something that was felt to be unknown at present. Such research, it was argued, would contribute to a better understanding of the distribution and destination of LGBT people within the criminal justice system and perhaps lead to developments in prison services to better support LGBT people.

### **3.1.8 Health**

There was broad acknowledgement that the sexual health of gay and bisexual men – particularly in relation to HIV - was one of the only areas of LGBT life that had in recent years been subject to considerable research inquiry. While it was felt that the continued funding of such research was necessary, it was also argued that this should not be the sole focus of research on the health of the LGBT communities. The health of other community members was felt to be by comparison neglected and in need of exploration. For instance the paucity of research concerning lesbian and bisexual women's health was underscored.

*'Lesbian health issues certainly. There's a definite lack of, you know, services round lesbian health issues, and it's something that I'm always ... keep getting panned about every time I go to meetings and stuff. 'We've got a gay men's project, where's the lesbian services?'* and there does seem to be a lack of services. There've been no needs assessments done on lesbian health needs, health requirements. Hopefully that's something that will come' (Regional Group, Gay Men's Group )

Representatives felt that there was little research on the general health needs of LGBT communities outside the remit of sexual health and HIV. One area highlighted by participants was the area of mental health of LGBT people. This was perceived as a research priority that related to a diverse range of specific research questions, for example, the experience and prevalence of suicide or self-harm. More broadly, there was recurrent discussion amongst participants about the need to investigate the nature and extent of dependency on alcohol and drugs amongst LGBT people. Fundamental to these enquires was the need to explore any potential relationship between a person's sexual orientation or gender dysphoria and their vulnerability to experiences of mental distress or instability. In addition, it was felt that research was required to understand the service needs of LGBT people who have addiction problems, and more broadly to explore how LGBT people fare within mental health (and general) health services.

### **3.1.9 Employment and Training**

Representatives identified the importance of researching actual career pathways of LGBT people to understand the discrimination they experience and the employment sectors and geographical areas where this may be most pronounced. In addition, the need to investigate other factors that affect the working life of LGBT people was also discussed, particularly the

perceived exclusion of LGBT people (by themselves or by employers) from certain types of careers and professions – for example teaching, childcare or the armed services.

Training was also identified as an important research priority. As outlined in Chapter 2, public service provision was not perceived, at present, as equipped to accommodate the unique needs of LGBT people. Accordingly, the value of research that could identify what training was needed for public sector workers was underscored, as was the utility of exploring effectiveness of different approaches to training .

### **3.1.10 Interpersonal Relationships**

There was a general view that little was known about the expression of intimacy amongst LGBT people, about relationship formation (and dissolution) and about the successes and difficulties surrounding such issues. In addition, perceived public unease with the overt expression of same sex intimacy was seen as a distinct difficulty for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Consequently, it was believed that research was required to explore the effect of this on the expression of intimacy amongst same sex partners and to investigate any implications this had on the formation of relationships.

*‘I’ve got a bee in my bonnet just now about relationships, interpersonal relationships with gay men in particular. Recent work that’s been done by Sigma I think in London and Manchester identified inability to show same sex affection in public as a major perceived barrier to sexual health...A lot of the stuff about education, looking at the things that actually impact on the relationships that we’re able to form...unless we have a much clearer picture than we do now of what those issues are we can’t actually develop services that are going to respond to those needs in an effective way’ (Central Belt Group, non-affiliated representative)*

### **3.1.11 Equality**

There was a common belief that research was needed to understand whether existing equality legislation – such as the Disability Discrimination Act - was having a positive impact on the lives of those it was meant to improve. This was perceived to be an important precursor to the development of any legislation that would aim to guarantee equality for LGBT people and protect them from discrimination. Equally, investigating the nature of inequality across the population as a whole, and understanding the shared nature of inequality across gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality was suggested as one possible way of moving towards a single Equalities Act or body in Scotland.

### **3.1.12 Funding**

As previously identified, concern was expressed around the use of funding for HIV prevention to support community activities outside of that remit. Consequently, the need for a greater understanding of the effects of this was highlighted, both on the resources available for HIV initiatives and the development of an LGBT infrastructure.

An associated research question, and perhaps one that would have interest outside of LGBT communities, was the need to evaluate current funding strategies for voluntary sector organisations. Of particular interest here was the impact current funding practices and priorities have on the provision of support to community members. Furthermore the mode

and pace of existing funding (particularly for HIV services) was a source of some criticism and it was felt that research could contribute to reform of the current system of payment.

## **3.2 Broader Research Priorities**

The group discussions generated a diverse range of specific research questions described in detail above. In addition, there was recurrent mention of areas of inquiry that, rather than relating to specific questions or topics, appeared more broad based in nature and could likely have relevance for policy development across a range of Departments within the Executive. Three such areas, in particular, featured in representatives' discussion. These encompassed the nature and extent of the LGBT community, attitudes to sexual orientation and transgender and issues of social inclusion. Each of these is discussed in more detail in this section.

### **3.2.1 Social Inclusion**

It was generally believed that little research had been conducted into social inclusion and whether or how this term or policy agenda had relevance for the LGBT community. Such research was felt to be important if the Executive was to meet its commitment, as set down in the *Equality Strategy*, to make Scotland a fully inclusive society. Inclusion was typically conceptualised in either economic or citizenship terms and it was felt that research was needed in relation to each.

Much of the concern about economic exclusion concerned the nature and extent of poverty and deprivation amongst LGBT people in Scotland. It was felt that certain stereotypes concerning the economic profile of LGBT communities – of the strength of the 'pink pound' or the high disposable income LGBT people were said to have relative to the general population – were unfounded. In this respect, it was felt that such myths often obscured the diversity of socio-economic status within LGBT communities and the extent of social deprivation that some LGBT people face on a daily basis. Furthermore, this misapprehension was believed to hamper calls for funding and resources to support LGBT community organisations. Thus, research that would help to illuminate the economic profile of LGBT communities was viewed as vital by participants.

*'...what research can be done by the Executive or funded by the Executive for their purposes which will make them sit up and realise that many people within the LGBT community are extremely disadvantaged socially. Not all of us are, I mean I think some of these issues will impact on all of us, but many people a tremendous number of these issues will impact. And one for me has to be sort of about income and deprivation sort of categories that really impact on people, you know, in terms of very poor health and very low income and really poor housing and so on. That's something I think that would be worth concentrating on because I think that what it would do is it would destroy many of the myths [named participant] was mentioning – the pink pound and so on, a lot of these sort of myths and things, blow them away'*  
(Central Belt Group, LGBT Youth Organisation)

Issues of citizenship concerned two issues – the extent to which those who were lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered participated within the LGBT community, and the degree to which LGBT people feel they are a part of mainstream Scottish society. Research was perceived as being a key way of investigating the participation of LGBT people within LGBT 'culture' – i.e. their access to and participation in community resources and agencies and their

involvement in the commercial scene that exists in many larger cities. Specific research questions here were manifold but included whether people were excluded from LGBT culture or community in its present form; whether community infrastructure at present was accommodating of diversity and difference; and whether any strategies could be identified for meeting the needs of the ‘hidden’ or not ‘out’ population of LGBT people living in Scotland.

In a similar vein, representatives identified how research was required to understand the extent to which LGBT people felt part of wider Scottish society. This was grounded in concern about the extent to which LGBT people felt they were able to participate in wider Scottish society while also being open about their sexual orientation or gender. This was felt to be important because the perceived exclusion of LGBT people to the margins of society was seen to make life difficult on a daily basis and to complicate, unnecessarily, the process of coming out for LGBT youth.

*‘It is that whole issue about inclusive societies, how much do they feel they participate? To what extent do they participate within a majority society as an out LGBT person, or to what extent do they participate solely within perceived LGBT societies? Or if they participate within majority society do they feel heavily closeted? That kind of stuff I find would be really quite critical.’* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )

### **3.2.2 Attitudes to sexual orientation and transgender**

Attitudes displayed towards LGBT people were conceptualised on three different levels by participants – those emanating from LGBT people themselves towards each other, those communicated by the Government and Public Services to LGBT people, and perhaps most importantly those attitudes to LGBT issues prevalent within the wider Scottish public. Research on all of these three levels was felt to be of importance.

In relation to attitudes within LGBT communities to sexual and transgender identities, participants outlined how issues such as poor self-image could play a role in relation to health, for example. Thus in terms of self-harm, suicide, HIV and STD prevention, LGBT people’s conception and valuation of themselves – and others like them - was felt to play a significant role in designing effective interventions and support. Participants felt that better understanding of the attitudes of non ‘out’ LGBT people was important, in order to be as fully inclusive as possible of them and their potentially acute service needs.

Organisational representatives argued that the attitudes of government and statutory agencies influenced the level of priority and importance assigned to LGBT issues. Understanding the nature of attitudes in the public sector was seen to be a key step in ensuring that LGBT issues were visible and addressed in formal and statutory contexts. It was suggested that public service delivery (including health, education and crime for example) was affected by the attitudes that some public sector workers held towards LGBT people. Consequently, representatives identified how research was needed to explore the attitudes of health, education and criminal justice system staff attitudes towards LGBT community members. This could contribute to a better understanding of the training needs required to address any negative attitudes that representatives felt were prevalent.

A pivotal question raised across all focus groups was the extent to which there had been change over time in terms of tolerance and/or support for LGBT communities amongst the Scottish public. For example, the recent campaigns surrounding the repeal of Section 2a was felt to have shifted public attitudes towards LGBT people and it was seen as important to measure the extent of such change. It was hoped that a greater understanding of attitudinal change (or not, as the case may be) would generate a more accurate picture of the extent to which society felt that discrimination against LGBT people was justified, where these attitudes were most prevalent and whether they were subject to change over time.

### *3.2.3 Understanding the nature and extent of the LGBT community*

A key theme that ran through much of the discussion was the need for research on the nature of ‘the LGBT community’ itself. Here, specific questions concerned the extent to which one could construe LGBT people as constituting a coherent community, or even a consortium of individual communities. There was recurrent debate within groups about the existence of a ‘community’ and it was clear that any research on this topic would be of considerable value.

Another main research priority highlighted was the need to measure the size of the LGBT population. This was seen as a necessary prerequisite to LGBT communities being awarded due weight and significance in a broad range of policy areas. To this end, many requests for research on specific policy areas described above – such as youth, parenting or education – were concerned with a quantification of need, in an effort to justify to funders that resources were required. It was felt that accurate evidence on the size of LGBT communities would counter any argument that LGBT communities were too small in size to be considered important in policy terms or in the allocation of public funds.

However, as well as contributing to the generation of resources and support for community concerns, a broader motivation concerned building an accurate demographic picture of LGBT communities - and this was felt by all participants to be absent at present.

Representatives offered a variety of strategies for conducting such research. These encompassed the inclusion of questions on sexual and gender identity on the next census or on various national household surveys conducted by the Executive. Alternatively, it was felt that given the next census was some way off, some sort of ‘mini-census’ designed to pick up LGBT people or specific surveys of LGBT people would give a more immediate answer to questions concerning the size of the population in Scotland. Nevertheless there were recurrent concerns voiced about the difficulties inherent in trying to estimate the size of LGBT communities from survey data (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

With this in mind, there was some support for the use of monitoring or administrative data to get a picture of the size and distribution of LGBT population in Scotland. The value of including sexual orientation as a demographic characteristic on all public service records, as well as reforming the way in which data on gender is collected, was repeatedly underscored. While there were strong concerns voiced about the confidentiality of such sensitive data, the opportunity such records would present to glean a more elaborate demographic profile of the LGBT population in Scotland was also considered attractive. There were also reservations voiced about the accuracy of such records, rooted in the belief that there would be great resistance to the collection of such data. Nevertheless, it was felt that over time this resistance would decrease and some participants suggested that sexual orientation could become as commonplace a demographic descriptor in the future as other characteristics like

ethnicity had become over the course of the last thirty years. Indeed, many recalled that in previous generations ethnicity had been omitted from public records, and its subsequent inclusion, was considered to have generated a greater understanding of how it can influence, for example, educational attainment, labour market participation and so on. Similarly, it was felt that the collection of data on sexual orientation through the public record system, and more accurate collection of data on gender, would lead, over time, to a fuller picture of the LGBT population. Moreover, it was likely that such routine collection of data would enable relationships between sexual orientation or gender and other social issues to emerge, for example, whether LGBT people are more at risk of social problems – like suicide, self harm, drug or alcohol dependency.

### **3.3 Issues for action, not research**

Given that much of this Chapter has discussed an overarching need for research on LGBT communities, and the rationale for the whole research study is based on the premise that there has been little research to date on such issues in Scotland, it may then come as a surprise to find that there were issues which were regarded by organisational representatives as not needing research. Such issues generally concerned what were considered to be the basic human rights of LGBT people and were therefore seen to be in need of immediate law reform rather than research. Broadly, these topics concerned issues of equality and safety and related to the right of LGBT people to conduct their daily lives without fear of discrimination or harm. They encompassed issues such as partnership and registration rights; laws to allow co-parenting and adoption by LGBT people; certain transgender issues such as birth certification; and crime and justice issues such as the prosecution of male rape and the outlawing of employment discrimination.

These issues were considered to be ethically and morally right and, from this perspective, needed only parity or redress under the law. For example, participants identified their expectation of parity in being able to enjoy the same partnership rights as mixed-sex couples and having the right to adopt or have children. Research to establish whether same-sex couples should enjoy these rights was not felt to be needed, merely that legislation should be changed to allow this to occur.

*‘I mean the whole sort of partnership rights, the legal change, no research needs to be done there is a simple issue of justice and equality there. Get on with it’* (Central Belt Group, Statutory Equalities officer)

However, while research on whether issues should be addressed was not perceived as necessary, participants sometimes felt that research was still useful because it could inform the shape of future policy on particular topics. For example, while partnership rights were perceived as needing redress, research was identified as important in determining which model of partnership could be developed as most appropriate for LGBT communities in Scotland. However, it was also stressed that such research should not impede a swift change in policy.

### **3.4 The value of research**

There was a general perception - highlighted earlier – that little research existed that focused specifically on LGBT communities in Scotland. However, there was also a great awareness amongst organisational representatives about the growing reliance of policymakers, funders

and service providers on research in providing the evidence for action or change. Representatives also noticed this within their own work and, from the way in which representatives spoke of research, it clearly played an important role – even though much of the research used originated from outside Scotland, particularly England and the United States. The value of such research was articulated in a variety of ways:

➤ **To inform organisational activities**

Representatives outlined how they commonly used research both to increase their own knowledge of relevant issues or to give information to service users. Here, having accurate and up-to-date information was considered of the utmost importance:

*'[And] again I think is where you know as a project we really come into play because we have got more information on ... gay men and men who have sex with men's behaviour than any other place in Scotland'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation)

*'[When] we're drawing on research for the Switchboard, you know if we're giving advice on safe sex issues for example then obviously it has to be based on reliable information'* (Regional Group, LGBT Switchboard)

*'I've used mental health studies before...[with the] mental health aspect to some degree of involvement and for advice from people to give advice, accurate advice, instead of 'I think it should be like this', you know?'* (Regional Group, Transgender Organisation)

In some services this need for accuracy was particularly underlined. For instance, representatives from organisations that worked in HIV prevention or treatment identified the importance of having up-to-date information, given the dynamic and changing nature of HIV infection amongst gay and bisexual men, and the speed with which the latest medical treatments became available.

There was also a belief that research was useful when outreaching to organisations outside of the community. This was felt to be particularly beneficial in building relationships with mainstream services. Representatives reported using research and information to better articulate the needs and expectations of LGBT people to such organisations, as illustrated by this participant:

*'I was using research information when trying to deal with the agencies that provide services. So for example if you were talking to [Regional] Police it's useful to know that there has been Edinburgh based, Fife based, and locally based research into issues around homophobia and so on, that kind of thing. So I think it's been helpful to inform our arguments'* (Regional Group, LGBT Organisation)

Research was also felt to be a crucial way for organisations to illuminate the ordinary lives of LGBT people, and more specifically, to demonstrate – particularly to policy makers and public services - the perceived discriminatory effects of existing law and policy.

➤ **To aid the development of community organisations**

There was a recurrent view that research was of central importance to LGBT voluntary organisations, either to their formation and establishment, or for their continued development or further expansion.

In the context of establishing projects and services, representatives identified how research was sometimes used to scope the need for services in relation to a particular issue – such as youth, parenting etc. These types of need assessments often identified the rationale for community based initiatives and services. Equally, research was seen as vital to the development of an organisation – at the very least in supporting a bid for funding, or more broadly, by justifying the aims or approach of an agency. For instance, the following representative – from an LGBT switchboard - spoke candidly about the role locally based research had played in legitimising them in the eyes of local statutory services, something which they hoped would lead to increased funding in the future:

*'[The Researcher] was the first person who recognised the validity of what the Switchboard was doing. We never ever received any funding at all from either the Health Board or the City Council. We still receive very little funding from the City Council. But before that point 7 years into existence we never ever were recognised, despite the fact we'd run the Switchboard for 7 years non stop with no money'* (Regional Group, LGBT Switchboard)

As part of ongoing development, research was also seen as important in evaluating projects or initiatives as they happen:

*'Well we use research in terms of evaluation. All of the information campaigns that we do externally...we tend to use methodologies such as 'Have you seen it?', 'Did you like it?' 'What do you think it said?'...and that sort of thing'* (Central Belt Group, Gay Men's Group)

While all organisations spoke of using research, there was clearly less emphasis placed on research by smaller organisations. Organisational representatives from smaller – mostly unfunded organisations - spoke of how they were generally overstretched in terms of time, money, personnel and overall capacity and so found little time to conduct small scale research, or to absorb or utilise research findings. This was felt to limit the value of research for these organisations.

*We can't afford it. We keep statistics. We have a call logging system that we're able to use which is really purely statistical. And to a certain extent, apart from the actual proper geographical stuff that is recorded and we can use for funders and is kept you know for ourselves where we take the statistics on the types of calls, the nature of the call, the issue of the call...but even in that I would have to say that there is a certain amount of subjectivity on that.* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Switchboard)

Because of this, smaller organisations spoke of how they relied more on 'informal' research to inform their approach and to aid in their development – mainly consultation with community members through social or professional networks. Such contacts – emphasised more by organisations based outside the central belt - were seen to be crucial in knowing the needs and expectations of locally based LGBT people. However, the value of such networks was felt to be no replacement for rigorous research, for such

'anecdotal' evidence of need was seen to be of little use when trying to generate funds for community infrastructure or activities.

➤ **To bring about change in policy or practice**

Throughout discussions representatives identified instances where research around specific issues, such as education, harassment or HIV had met with some success in either informing the general direction of policy or practice or in affecting real change. A recurrent example here was the perceived impact of two studies of homophobic crime on the practice of several police authorities throughout Scotland<sup>9</sup>. It was suggested that the findings of these studies had been instrumental in persuading police authorities – in some jurisdictions – to change the way they dealt with homophobic crime to make it more sensitive to the needs of LGBT people. The value that such applied policy research could have in a myriad of other areas was recurrently emphasised throughout the discussions.

However, while creating a research agenda for the LGBT community was largely interpreted in a positive fashion, there was also much scepticism about whether research could affect any real change on policy and practice, as illustrated by this representative's comments:

*'So you know the rhetoric is it should be evidence based, which would dictate the kind of research that's done. Not the research questions but how it's actually done in terms of the methods. But then, to be honest, I think it's bollocks, it doesn't work like that. Evidence doesn't actually lead to policy...however you know fantastic – randomised telephone survey of LGBT communities, you know perfect sample, you know real evidence of discrimination and its effects on health, could be completely ignored, even though it's very good evidence by any kind of scientific standards. I have very little faith that evidence actually turns into policy'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Researcher)

While organisational representatives identified a diverse range of contributions that research could make to the lives of LGBT people, there was also a determination voiced in all groups that such research should lead to action by the Executive and other public bodies. Otherwise, it was felt that there was little point to research on LGBT communities for its own sake.

*'I mean you can take a specific case, say transgender issues, and do as much research as you want and take as much time as you want into doing that. Once the research is done, okay, what next? You need action, it needs to be put in place and actually done, you know. Action speak much louder than words'* (Regional Group, LGBT Youth Organisation)

This chapter has outlined the concerns of organisational representatives in terms of research priorities (both broad and specific), those areas potentially not needing research, as well as

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<sup>9</sup> The studies referred to are Morrison, C and Mackay, A (2000) 'The Experience of Violence and Harassment of Gay Men in the City of Edinburgh' Scottish Executive Central Research Unit and Plant, M, Mason, B and Thornton, C (1999) 'Experiences and Perceptions of Violence and Intimidation of the Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Communities in Edinburgh' City of Edinburgh

highlighting the value of research in a variety of settings. The following chapter looks more closely at community views about the conduct of such research.

## 4 THE CONDUCT OF FUTURE RESEARCH

The group discussions have generated a broad, and substantial, research agenda. However, the discussion of research did not end there. Rather, organisational representatives had much to say about how such an agenda could be taken forward and actualised. This chapter, then, explores a range of issues related to the conduct of research. It begins by outlining participants' views about research methodologies. Issues pertinent to the competence of research are then explored. This is followed by an examination of the opinions expressed about where and by whom research on LGBT issues should be carried out. The final section deals with participation in research, focusing particularly on the barriers to involvement in research, as well as exploring some of the solutions offered.

### 4.1 Research methodologies

Throughout the discussion of research priorities, it was clear that organisational representatives are as concerned about research methodology as they are about the research priorities identified. This is perhaps unsurprising given that one of the main criticisms felt to be leveled at existing research on LGBT communities in Scotland was the perception that it lacked quality. Consequently, there was concern that any future research should be rigorous.

It should be noted from the outset that it was not the function of these group discussions to formulate exact methodologies for conduct of robust research. Indeed, participants were recruited for their expertise on LGBT issues, and to a certain extent, their knowledge of the views of the larger population of LGBT people, rather than for any expertise in the area of research (although this was present in some of the groups). It is unsurprising therefore that the views expressed about methodology are not precise and while the discussions have generated many valuable suggestions for how research on LGBT issues can be carried out, there are also naiveties in some of the views expressed. In addition, there are certain issues of methodology that representatives did not discuss – and their lack of mention here should not be seen to indicate any judgment about their salience. The appropriateness of various methodologies for research on LGBT issues is the subject of the methodological review – which is a companion study to this consultation<sup>10</sup>. For a more informed discussion of viable methodological options, the reader is referred to this. However, it is still important that representatives' views about methodology are reported – regardless of how viable they may be. These are outlined in the following sections. Where such views can benefit from knowledge of broader methodological issues – this is indicated in the text.

#### 4.1.1 *The role of survey research*

The emphasis on generating statistics about LGBT people through surveys of the Scottish public or through surveys of LGBT people were all related in some way to a need for a greater understanding of the structure and profile of the communities (discussed in Chapter 3) and consequently with redressing the perceived invisibility of LGBT communities in Scotland. As discussed, the collection of demographic data on the nature of LGBT communities was seen as having the power to convince policy makers – at national and local

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<sup>10</sup> McManus S (2003) *Op Cit*

level – of both the existence of LGBT communities and of the extent of their needs in a whole variety of ways, for example, in relation to funding of community groups, or with regard to better and more equal service provision for LGBT people, and so on. It was argued that since the collection of statistics on minority ethnic communities in Scotland began, greater consideration was shown by policy makers of the needs of those communities and, consequently, this led to greater provision of funding and services to minority ethnic Scots. Thus, it was hoped that the collection of accurate and robust statistics on LGBT people in Scotland would result in similar favourable outcomes.

*'I think we know most of the things we want to know already but the fear is that if you don't come before an Executive with exact figures then you will be tossed out on your ear before being given a listen to for funding. You know statistics and figures are the shield and sword of anybody applying for grants and funding'* (Regional Group, Transgender Group )

*'The point I want to make is that in an ideal situation we should have evidence-based practice which would mean that you know the kind of research that's commissioned should be you know very good samples, it should be quantitative, because numbers have more power, it should be you know as rigorously scientific as possible. I think qualitative research for example with organisations would be a waste of time. That would be the kind of official line of kind of current evidence-based policy'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Researcher)

However, while great emphasis was placed on the value of survey research, there was also some reservation about its utility, particularly if used in isolation from other data techniques. A primary concern related to the difficulties in conducting survey research amongst LGBT people. Here, the sometimes hidden nature of the LGBT existence was seen as a key obstacle in generating reliable, and generalisable, estimates of LGBT presence in Scotland. Fear of disclosure and concerns about confidentiality were felt to lead to under-reporting of LGBT identity or behaviour in surveys. In this respect, it was feared that survey research may only capture the more open or out LGBT experience in Scotland, which it was felt would not generate a representative picture of LGBT existence. These barriers to participation in research are discussed more fully below.

*'I don't think it'd ever be terribly accurate because of all the sort of avoiding of labelling yourself that goes on. I think people generally mistrust that kind of thing'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Switchboard)

Given this methodological difficulty, there was general concern that, rather than lead to greater support for policy change, underestimates of the size of LGBT communities could lead to less support for LGBT concerns. However, despite this, there was still strong support for some kind of survey or 'census' of LGBT people in Scotland<sup>11</sup>. It was suggested that one way of tackling such concern was to make questions about sexual orientation commonplace on large household surveys<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Carrying out a survey or census of LGBT people faces the main hurdle of how such a sample could be obtained, and would it be representative. There are difficulties in the attempt to achieve a representative sample of any minority population and this is compounded by the 'hidden' nature of LGBT people. Only a survey that includes non-LGBT people will ever be able to put reliable estimates on the number of LGBT people there are. To provide such estimates this needs to be a random sample of private households. These issues are discussed further in the methodological review. McManus S (2003) *Op Cit*

<sup>12</sup> Including questions on sexuality in household surveys presents a number of difficulties not all of which received attention within the groups. Chief among these is that the level of disclosure involved, may not result

This view was rooted in the belief that repeated inclusion of such questions would lead, over time, to increased levels of disclosure and also increased response rates amongst the LGBT community. It was also felt that greater assurances about the anonymity and confidentiality of survey data would assuage fear of negative consequences and lead to greater openness among LGBT people in answering survey questions about sexual or gender identity.

*'...things like the Scottish Household Survey and the Census and so on, you are not encouraged to be honest in your answers. So long as people genuinely know those things are anonymous gradually people will feel more and more able as the years go by to be open in their answers to those kinds of surveys. And then we'd find out more about the reality of people's families and relationships'* (Central Belt Group, Statutory Equalities Officer )

More general criticisms related to the role of statistics in the creation of policy on equality issues. Here it was argued that policy change should be a matter of principle rather than guided by the number of people affected by inequality, in short, that even if one person was excluded or assaulted then that was one too many.

*'And the reality is that to address inclusion and diversity within this society...the numbers don't matter it's the equality that matters, it's the principles that matter so I don't think all the areas...for example if there's bullying and discrimination in school...it doesn't matter what the percentage is, the fact is it should never happen'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Organisation)

However, there was also acknowledgement that though equality was a matter of principle, the allocation of resources by central and local government would always be guided by an estimate of need – something which is difficult to demonstrate without some quantitative inquiry.

#### **4.1.2 The role of qualitative research**

While great emphasis was placed by organisational representatives on the need for statistics in order to measure the size of LGBT communities and the extent of their service need in relation to a great variety of issues, considerable import was also placed upon the value of understanding the LGBT experience in Scotland – something which, it was felt, was much more the role of a qualitative enquiry. Qualitative data was viewed as getting the stories of LGBT communities across with more immediacy and depth. Organisational representatives identified the power of individual testimonies and case studies, particularly in illustrating examples of exclusion and/or discrimination and in explaining how these impacted upon individuals' lives and families.

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in the collection of accurate reliable data – particularly of younger people and those who are not out or public about their sexuality or gender dysphoria. There are also concerns that inclusion of questions about sexual orientation or changing how gender is asked could impact upon response rates to household surveys – which may compromise the robustness of any estimates that such research could produce. Finally, it should be noted that it is unlikely that a National survey would have big enough sample sizes to support robust sub-group analysis – without some method of boosting samples of the relevant groups (this is established practice for National Surveys involving minority ethnic groups). Again such issues are discussed further in the methodological review.

*'I think it's probably qualitative rather than quantitative research that's going to do...it's getting somebody's story, that's the reality'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Organisation)

Qualitative research was also seen to have considerable advantages over survey approaches in that it was more likely to identify and include the more hidden or less out LGBT perspectives. It was felt important that any assessment of LGBT communities should include the needs of those people who do not identify as LGBT but whose lifestyle and needs may correspond with LGBT people. As mentioned above, it was thought unlikely that this perspective would be captured through any statistical enquiry.

*'Folks who are not out and don't want to come out or have a fear of filling in forms and admitting it, you know all these things...are really barriers to clear research, which this community has...a lot of people are quite happy ticking the box whereas [this could be an]...issue that other folks may not be. And it is perhaps the people who are not out that some of these issues are greatest for'* (Central Belt Group, Gay Men's Group)

There were, however, some reservations about the use of qualitative research. Qualitative approaches were not always perceived as rigorous and (by consequence) were seen to lack objectivity, particularly in the eyes of policy makers and funding agencies. This may be related to the fact that some qualitative research studies had been carried out by community organisations and perceived by policy makers to present a partial view. However, the broader limitations of qualitative research – in not being able to provide statistical estimates – were also emphasised. Finally, qualitative research was also perceived to be more expensive than survey approaches and therefore perhaps outside the scope of present resources.

Thus, in strategic terms, quantitative data was seen as having greater legitimacy, even though there was a strong belief by participants in the ability of qualitative approaches to tell the story of LGBT experience more effectively. Consequently, there was a recurrent view that a mixed methodology would work best –guided by the belief that through combined use the limitations inherent in each research methodology could be counterbalanced.

*'I think the [name of study] is good because it's a mixture of stats and personal...you know the report was because it solved a wee bit of the problem of...it's got stats in it but it's also got personal anecdotes if you know what I mean and people's wee stories or whatever.'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Organisation)

*...even if that means one lesbian woman or one gay man is being beaten to a pulp regularly then that's one too many... so numbers are important. What makes a difference....especially [with] Section 28 [was] some of the testimonies that people made....these are powerful things. So I think that you need qualitative information as well as quantitative information. You need both really.* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )

## **4.2 Views about the competency of research**

While it was never the aim of this consultation to generate a review of research on LGBT issues in Scotland, organisational representatives recurrently made mention of existing research. However, organisational representatives had their own views about the competency

of such research – which pinpoint important methodological considerations for any future research conducted on LGBT issues.

Much of the discussion concerned whether existing research was representative of the diverse experiences of LGBT people. There was much discussion surrounding the different circumstances of the more and less out LGBT individual. Existing research, it was felt, could be flawed by an over reliance on the experiences and views of the more out LGBT person. A central concern in this discussion was the amount of research that is conducted using convenience sampling on the commercial scene. This was felt to lead to research fatigue but perhaps more seriously, it was felt that convenience sampling can taint the representativeness of survey results.

There were also questions raised about the validity of findings between existing studies. Where more than one research study had been conducted on a particular topic (a rare occurrence given the paucity of research on LGBT issues) participants voiced the confusion about the meaning of apparently contradictory findings for the reliability of the research.

A final point was raised in relation to competence related to the motivation for conducting research on LGBT issues. It was felt that the lack of research on LGBT issues had promoted many in the pursuit of academic success to try to bridge gaps in current knowledge. However, the professionalism of such research was questioned – especially at undergraduate level – and the over reliance on community organisations to assist in such studies was felt to contribute to fatigue. It was also felt that such research was often inaccessible to community members – and though it served the needs of researchers in obtaining a degree or qualification – it generally was of little value to the LGBT community.

*‘Oh it’s serious research but it might be research for the dissertation and then the person goes off and gets a job and there it ends, or it may be research for PhD and it gets taken further. You never find out, that’s the trouble. I know people do, there is lots of different LGBT related research done, whether or not they do it for – they’re funded to do it or they’re just doing it to get there degree and then [they] disappear, I mean it happens all the time’ (Central Belt Group, Student LGBT Officer)*

### **4.3 Carrying out research**

The objectivity required from any researcher or research organisation that carried out research on LGBT issues was consistently underscored. This discussion arose out of dissatisfaction that the value of previous community based research had been undermined by criticism of its objectivity. Thus, the autonomy of any future research was seen as integral to its acceptance by policymakers and funders, and to ensure that any recommendations would be considered legitimate. In order for this to occur, it was argued that research organisations would need to provide an objective and neutral perspective on the issues to hand.

*‘I think it’s important not to have any data or any organisation that could taint it for any gain at all. Someone who’s just completely independent that has done research in a sensitive manner without trying to sell something. And at the end of the day it’s a wasted exercise if you have people saying ‘Oh, it’s done by..., you know’ (Central Belt Group, LGBT Organisation)*

This insistence on objectivity was somewhat complicated by the wish for researchers on LGBT issues to have a keen grasp of community issues and a knowledge of LGBT life, qualities it was felt would make research more sensitive to and less intrusive of LGBT communities, and qualities that were generally expected of LGBT researchers or organisations themselves. Consequently, these two seemingly incongruous aims sparked considerable debate in each group discussion about who was best placed to act as researcher on LGBT issues in Scotland. The key points of this debate are outlined in this section.

#### **4.3.1 Research by external researchers or agencies**

Independence was typically associated with research carried out by agencies or researchers from outside the LGBT communities. This is not to say that research carried out by LGBT community organisations was considered biased. Rather, there was a general support for the accuracy of such research but also an acknowledgement that such research lacked credence among policy makers and funders. Thus, the argument for ‘independent’ researchers outwith LGBT communities was generally a strategic one, in that it was hoped that the involvement of external research agencies would bring greater legitimacy to LGBT research. Research organisations outside of LGBT communities were perceived to have greater objectivity in the eyes of statutory funding agencies and policy-makers, because it was presumed that they had no vested interests or political agenda. Consequently, this was felt to be the main way that future accusations of bias or impartiality could be overturned. In addition, it was suggested that research conducted outwith the LGBT communities was likely to have more kudos with policymakers and funders and, consequently, and as a result, that any recommendations arising would be carry more weight.

The other main advantage of having researchers or agencies from outwith the community involved in researching community issues concerned the degree of objectivity that they could bring to addressing research questions. For instance, it was argued that external researchers were better placed to investigate community experiences, views and motivations and had the benefit of a perspective unperturbed by community allegiances, difficulties or disputes. It was also felt that external researchers would be able to raise issues or topics with LGBT communities and respondents that it may be difficult for a community researcher to address.

*‘Cos if you do it within the LGBT community it will always be questioned, people will always say ‘Aye, well you would say that anyway’, and that’s what people want to do. And I do, I feel quite strongly, it should be totally outwith the LGBT community’*  
(Regional Group, Gay Men’s Organisation)

#### **4.3.2 Research conducted by LGBT organisations and researchers**

Despite such arguments, organisational representatives outlined a range of factors that gave support to research that was carried out by community organisations and researchers. Chief amongst these was the view that community researchers were likely to have greater knowledge of LGBT life, and thus, were better situated to conduct research in a sensitive way. Because of their experience of working closely with LGBT populations, such organisations were perceived as having more established local networks and a closer understanding of the dynamics, configurations and distribution of local LGBT communities (significant in the probable absence of any local demographic data). It was also felt that research from within the community would likely be more relevant to and grounded within community needs.

*'I'm not trying to claim that community-based organisations would have any great sort of objectivity as to what mindset they interpret data with, but I would say that it might be, if no more accurate, perhaps more up to date, more relevant and more culturally embedded with greater understanding'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )

There was some belief that research conducted by LGBT researchers would also lead to greater community participation (discussed in more detail below). It was suggested, for example, that LGBT researchers would likely engender greater trust and confidence in respondents, and perhaps, greater belief in the utility of the research. In addition, researchers within LGBT communities were seen to be better placed to access the more hidden populations of LGBT people who may otherwise get missed from research if conducted by external research organisations.

The potential for LGBT respondents to be more open with LGBT researchers was also mooted. Here it was suggested that respondents may simply not feel comfortable and, as a result, disclose less information in research conducted by non-LGBT people. In this respect, the value of 'matching' respondent and researcher was emphasised, as illustrated by the following comment:

*'Well I think it's got to be professional able researchers, but I do have an issue with you know...I mean I'm not saying straight people can't do it but you know I think there are problems. It's a bit like a man doing research into women's issues, it's not impossible but I think it is advantageous to the research if it's constructed and led by gay and lesbian people...I'm not saying that a straight person couldn't do it but you know I think it removes barriers much more readily if it's a gay or lesbian person who's researching'* (Central Belt Group, Union Equalities representative)

Finally, on a more pragmatic note, it was highlighted that many LGBT organisations depended on being commissioned to carry out community based research in order to keep afloat. To locate research outside of the LGBT communities was therefore seen as removing a vital financial resource, which could potentially destabilise the Scottish voluntary LGBT sector.

#### **4.3.3 Research partnership - A way forward**

On balance, the discussion was not as divided as one might think from the different views outlined above. Indeed, at times the same representative articulated contradictory views, seeing both the benefits and drawbacks of each approach.

*'It's a double-edged sword, there's pros and cons. I wouldn't go down one absolute road in either direction, I think certainly external research but in consultation with the community, I think that's the only middle course'* (Regional LGBT Group, Gay Men's Group )

Comments like this demonstrate the need to incorporate independence, objectivity and sensitivity in any future research endeavour. In this sense, there was felt to be a clear role for community organisations and researchers in making external research agencies more sensitive to the needs of the LGBT communities – for example through the provision of

awareness training, commenting on research specifications, methodologies and also on the results of research:

*'I think the researchers or the people who are drawing up the research specification need to have had awareness training of what the issues are because you could be completely ignorant, but the problem is I think if gay organisations do research, then the consequence of that is 'Well, you would say that wouldn't you?' and therefore.... I think people who don't want to hear the consequences of your research will be able to dismiss it...And so [they should be] people who've had proper awareness training but who are part of an accredited agency should be doing it'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT Organisation)

Equally, there was seen to be a role for external agencies in enhancing the effectiveness of community based research – perhaps by the provision of training, support and advice in research and evaluation methods. More broadly, the potential for collaborative ventures in research was also mooted – where external research agencies and community organisations worked in tandem on a piece of research – to ensure that a study was both community based but also independent.

#### **4.4 Participation in research**

The final set of issues that relate to the future conduct of research encompassed the participation of LGBT people in research about their lives and communities. Identifying ways of encouraging participation in research was generally viewed as crucial to its success. In their discussion of this, organisation representatives identified a range of factors that prevented or discouraged LGBT people from participation in research. These are considered in this section, as are the potential solutions that were also suggested.

##### **4.4.1 Research overload and fatigue**

The difficulties posed by research fatigue were emphasised throughout the group discussions, particularly by representatives of gay and bisexual men. The vast amount of research conducted on the sexual behaviour of men who have sex with men over the past twenty years (since the onset of HIV) was felt to have led to considerable resistance to research inquiry amongst them. As highlighted in Chapter 3, other populations were by contrast considered to be under researched. Consequently, it is likely that research fatigue is less of an issue amongst lesbian and bisexual women and transgendered people.

There was some feeling that younger members of the LGBT community were also at risk of research fatigue. Participants identified an over-reliance on peer support projects and other community organisations to research issues relating to LGBT youth – or an overuse of the commercial scene (such as bars, clubs and other establishments) in which young people were more likely to congregate.

*'Young people [are] going to start to get all questionaired out and all interviewed out ... if they aren't already feeling a bit like they're under the microscope because constantly they're filling in questionnaires and they're doing interviews, and what happens at the end of it all? They're still feel like 'Here we go, another bit of research and nothing's going to happen, we're not going to get any more services, we're not going to get any more support'. (Central Belt Group, LB Youth Organisation)*

As with all communities, intrusion into respondents' limited spare time was seen to lead to research fatigue. In particular, the recruitment (and sometimes interviewing) of respondents within social venues such as pubs and clubs was seen to promote a general distaste for research, which was seen to usurp valuable (and for some limited) leisure time.

As the representative quoted above identifies, the feeling of being over-researched was also felt to be related to the lack of feedback received about previous research studies. Particularly where studies were conducted in England, Scotland and Wales, it was argued that results were rarely communicated in a way that gave findings for Scotland – separate to other countries.

*'The publicity has been for England and Wales. Every news item 'England and Wales'. Nothing about Scotland at all. So if you are Scots you actually feel it doesn't matter how much information you give central bodies, nothing is done with it. There's no feedback say. And it needs to be publicised that something is being done with it'* (Regional Group, Gay Men's Group)

Opinions such as this were seen to represent a more general scepticism about the utility of taking part in research studies. Without the wide dissemination of research findings, and evidence that research can lead to concrete changes in policy or practice – it was seen as more and more difficult to persuade individuals to participate in research studies – no matter whether they were conducted by agencies within or outwith the LGBT community.

#### **4.4.2 Issues of identity**

There was a recurring view that participation in LGBT research required more of LGBT people than research usually required of a respondent in that it obliged LGBT people to both identify in a particular way and to disclose that identity to other people. Both of these issues were seen to have significant implications for the level of participation one could expect in studies of LGBT people.

Throughout the discussions, there was a clear distinction drawn between people who considered themselves to be lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender – regardless of whether they chose to make this public knowledge – and those who had same sex sexual encounters, or had knowledge of their gender dysphoria, but who did not (for a variety of reasons) choose to interpret this in terms of an identity. Thus, it was felt that research that targeted LGBT people would not be likely to capture the latter group of individuals and, consequently, would be unlikely to represent the views, experiences or behaviour of these people. In this respect, these people were seen to be the most 'hidden' type of LGBT respondent.

*'Some people will identify themselves as being gay, some will not, though in practice their sexual behaviour is gay. Some people will identify as bisexual, some will not...Some will identify as lesbians, some will be lesbian by practice, and so on. So it is a very complicated area. Some won't admit their sexuality because of religious or belief systems they are part of. So it's a fraught area but doesn't stop the need for those kind of figures'* (Regional Group, LGBT organisation)

The second area of difficulty concerns those who do identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender but who may not publicly acknowledge this. Throughout the discussions,

organisational representatives catalogued a whole range of reasons why people may refuse to disclose their sexual or gendered identities, which mainly related to fear of homo- and transphobic reactions from family, peers, employers and colleagues and wider society. In this respect, it was felt that those who were not publicly admitting of their sexual orientation were unlikely to jeopardise their safety or security by participating in LGBT research – regardless of how useful they felt it to be. Indeed it was suggested that not ‘out’ LGBT people would simply not want to participate in anything that they perceived was related to LGBT communities, including research commissioned under ‘LGBT’ auspices, and as such constituted a second type of ‘hidden’ LGBT population.

*‘I mean it is wrong to talk about the LGBT community as I think we’d all acknowledge and accept that there are numerous communities within that. And within that there some communities of people, if you’re talking sets of people, who would not identify as being within any community whatsoever ...so much so that they’d probably be resistant to the idea in fact’ (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )*

There was much discussion throughout the groups of the importance of including these two ‘hidden’ groups within any research conducted on LGBT people, although, there were some who questioned whether LGBT research by its very nature should attempt to represent those who do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The lack of participation by either group, however, was generally viewed as limiting the validity of LGBT research, which it was argued would only give voice to the more open or out experience. Without an understanding of both the more open and ‘hidden’ experience, it was argued that research would fail to understand the fluidity between these circumstances – where it was felt a lot could be learned about the strategies for supporting people in coming to terms with their sexual identity or gender dysphoria. Indeed, it was suggested by some that exploring ‘hidden communities’ was a more important research priority than understanding ‘out’ LGBT experience because the service and information needs may well be more acute.

#### **4.4.3 The definition of community**

The way in which LGBT people were conceptualised by researchers – and by policy makers – was seen to have considerable implications for those who participated in research. Participants highlighted a popular misconception that researching LGBT people involved accessing a straightforward and identifiable set of individuals, something that the discussion in the preceding section has demonstrated is clearly not the case. Throughout the group discussions a recurrent set of questions were raised about the nature of community that respondents felt had important implications for defining who the participants in LGBT research were likely to be. In this respect, organisational representatives questioned whether there was any coherent definition of what constituted an LGBT community. In addition, they debated whether it was one community or some sort of consortium of related communities (each deserving specific research exercises). Leading on from this were queries about who the likely members were and whether membership was based on behaviour or identity or both. Indeed a broader question related to whether a ‘community’ existed at all. All of these issues were felt to complicate research objectives because, depending on the answers, one could end up with very different sets of participants for ‘community’ research.

*‘I mean what is a community? Are we community representatives? Or are we the ones that speak the loudest? Or whatever... So there’s all of those issues and there is that understanding of the definition of community or communities is so disparate*

*because we are such a disparate group of people, and which is part of our strength as well, so there are these fundamentals that have to be addressed'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation)

#### **4.4.4 Enhancing participation in research**

Throughout their discussion of participation in research, organisational representatives highlighted a range of strategies for overcoming difficulties in encouraging participation<sup>13</sup>. These encompassed:

➤ **Foster genuine belief in anonymity and confidentiality**

There was a clear sense that greater participation in research could be achieved by clearer articulation of the confidentiality of research data and the anonymity of research participants. Giving better guidance to potential respondents about what happens to research data, and using instruments – such as self completion questionnaires – to record sensitive data, could achieve this. It was anticipated that this could lead to greater participation in research by the more hidden populations outlined earlier – particularly in larger household based surveys – where it was felt there was a greater perception of anonymity. There was a strong role perceived for community organisations in informing LGBT people about the confidentiality of data and assurances of anonymity. It was felt that the involvement of community organisations would engender greater trust amongst LGBT people and thus lead to greater participation.

➤ **Consider how best to 'market' LGBT research**

There was sometimes a view that the branding of research as being about LGBT communities or individuals specifically excluded people who had difficulty coming to terms with their sexual orientation, or those who had similar behaviours but who did not identify in a similar way. Consequently, conducting research without necessarily using an 'LGBT' title was one way that representatives felt that participation could be increased for these more 'hidden' populations.

➤ **Reinforce the importance of data needs**

As a way of addressing some of the issues they raised in relation to research fatigue, participants felt it important to give a clear indication of the motivation for, and intended use of LGBT research to LGBT communities and individuals. This was seen as important in being able to counter perceptions that research was merely a way of postponing action. Moreover, it was felt that giving a clear indication of the motivation for and ultimate use of research was important in being accountable to LGBT communities. It was also felt that reasons for repeated or longitudinal research on a particular topic needs to be particularly emphasised to avoid perceptions of over-researching.

➤ **Think creatively about recruitment strategies**

An ever-present theme throughout all groups was the perceived need to think creatively about recruitment methodologies. Groups suggested a range of strategies that could

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<sup>13</sup> These methods are undoubtedly useful in all forms of research with LGBT people – both qualitative and quantitative. However, for survey research there remains the broader question of how to achieve a representative and robust sample of LGBT people – this needs significant attention prior to overcoming the recruitment barriers. Again, the methodological review provides more in depth discussion of this point.

increase participation. For example, it was suggested that recruitment of respondents should not be limited to the commercial scene and those who use community organisations or read LGBT publications. Rather, wider use should be made of municipal or public venues (such as town halls, swimming pools, libraries or parks) as places to advertise LGBT research or even as venues for picking up or dropping off questionnaires. It was felt that this could lead to greater participation without compromising anonymity. In a similar vein, the use of the Internet as a method of contacting and/or recruiting people was underscored. This was felt to be of particular value to LGBT individuals in rural areas. This again was a way of preserving the anonymity of respondents but also a way of reaching a wider sample of people – particularly more hidden populations of LGBT individuals. However, certain access issues were also raised. For instance, not all LGBT people were felt to have access to or familiarity with the Internet and so would be excluded from this approach.

➤ **Be clear about why the research is being done and about its potential benefits**

As noted earlier – there was much scepticism about the value of research and its influence on policy and practice. Any evidence which could verify its role in this regard would likely increase participation in research.

This chapter has explored perceptions of how future research should be commissioned and carried out and how participation within it should be best encouraged. The next chapter examines views relating to the co-ordination of research, specifically commissioning and dissemination.

## 5 THE CO-ORDINATION OF RESEARCH

This chapter focuses on views expressed concerning the co-ordination of research on LGBT issues. It concerns two main issues. First, views concerning the commissioning of research are discussed, particularly on the roles envisaged for different public and community bodies in Scotland. Second, ideas about the dissemination of research are explored – highlighting the need for increased access to research that is produced on LGBT communities.

### 5.1 Commissioning research

The commissioning of research on LGBT issues was a topic that garnered much attention. There was a consistently expressed view that responsibility for commissioning lay mainly with the Scottish Executive, though there was also seen to be a role for local authorities and larger LGBT organisations in keeping any research commissioned relevant to community needs. In the course of discussion organisational representatives outlined key barriers that they perceived to have prevented the commissioning of research on LGBT issues to date, and based on these, some advice was offered about best practice in future commissioning. Each of these issues is explored in further depth in the following sections.

#### 5.1.1 *The role of the Scottish Executive*

Organisational representatives articulated a clear role for the Executive in taking the lead in commissioning research on LGBT issues in Scotland in order to bring research on LGBT issues in line with that conducted on other equality issues. There was a general view that the Executive had the status, power and resources to better co-ordinate research in this area and to compare it to data gathered on other equality issues such as gender, ethnicity, disability and age. It was argued that other equality groups had appropriate statutory bodies who were best placed to commission research (e.g. Commission for Racial Equality for minority ethnic communities and Disability Rights Commission for disabled people), but that there was no equivalent body that could steer the commissioning process for research on LGBT issues, and thus the Executive was the only obvious body to fulfil such a role. While LGBT organisations – particularly large National organisations – were identified as having the potential capacity to commission research on specific issues (e.g. a gay men’s health agency supporting research on smoking behaviour amongst gay and bisexual men), it was felt that this could lead to a piecemeal approach research agenda and result in considerable gaps in knowledge. In this respect, there was a recurrent view that the Executive was better placed to develop a comprehensive research programme in close collaboration with community organisations.

*‘Yeah, absolutely. It has to be a top down thing, there’s too many ... there’s been an awful lot of research that’s been ad hoc and random and you know not particularly coordinated and focussed and it has to be a top down procedure. ...So from that point of view they are best placed. Because there’s a lot of great stuff coming from central government in Scotland now, but it’s all hints, nudges, and they are best placed to direct that even if not to carry it out directly themselves.’ (Regional Group, Gay Men’s Group )*

The strong emphasis placed on the Executive as a commissioner of research on LGBT issues was rooted in the perception that it was the only body that had the financial resources to

support such a wide ranging research agenda. The Executive was clearly perceived to be well resourced and thus able to allocate adequate levels of funding for research.

The role of the Executive, however, extended far beyond the financial resources it could potentially provide. Rather, there was a general impression that the Executive played a leading and defining role in social research in Scotland. Consequently, it was felt that its involvement in the commissioning and co-ordination of research on LGBT issues would ensure that studies were both objective and rigorous. Given that research commissioned by community organisations is sometimes criticised for its presumed partiality, it was seen as necessary for any future research to attract the attention and respect of both researchers and policy makers.

The powers of the Executive to ensure that research was properly and widely disseminated were underscored and it was felt that this could lead to increased public and community knowledge of LGBT issues. It was also believed that research carried out under the auspices of the Executive was more likely to feed into policy development than research commissioned by other authorities or organisations.

### **5.1.2 The role of other bodies**

Interestingly, it was rare for organisational representatives to conceive any role for Whitehall departments in research on Scottish LGBT issues, though there was general acknowledgement that much of the research produced in England and Wales would undoubtedly also contribute to learning in Scotland. There was, in general, seen to be limited scope for bodies other than the Executive to be involved in research commissioning. Some of this is clearly related to an apparent lack of knowledge amongst community members of potential research commissioners or funders – apart from central government. For example, little mention was made of public bodies such as the Community Fund, or more charitable commissioners like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Equally, there was scant recognition of the role of academia in developing research agendas – through institutes like the Economic and Social Research Council.

Where other bodies are mentioned in relation to commissioning, it is generally because of the contribution they can make in deciding the research agenda or the advice they can offer on how research is best carried out. For instance, LGBT organisations rarely conceived themselves as being sufficiently equipped in either expertise or financial resources to commission their own research – except perhaps for the larger national agencies. Consequently, representatives generally envisaged their role as one of guiding and advising the Executive in community priorities, as well as highlighting – where necessary - community concerns about approaches and methodology. However, there was sometimes concern that the limited resources of community organisations – and the lack of a national infrastructure for some constituent parts of the LGBT community - may mean that some parts of the community may not have the capacity to fulfil even this type of consultancy role.

*‘There is scope I think for research commissioned by the Scottish Executive to be influenced by LGBT organisations...but the capacity at the moment is not there for [some] organisations. There’s no national organisation working on lesbian health, for example, there’s no national organisation working on transgender issues. So I think although it would be a very good thing to have research carried out close to the community, we have to recognise there’s a capacity problem and it’s only going to be as the capacity is built up amongst LGBT organisations that it’s going to be possible*

*to do that kind of research in other areas of the LGBT communities'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation)

Local authorities were also identified as being of possible benefit to the commissioning process because of their knowledge of locally based issues throughout Scotland. However, there was also concern that Local Authorities did not always have the necessary understanding of LGBT issues to meaningfully contribute to the commissioning process, as underscored by this representative:

*'The Authorities which are given the responsibility for that commissioning have to have a basic modicum of understanding, and quite honestly, that's not true for Local Authorities in Scotland at the moment. I think it's true for the Scottish Executive'* (Regional Group, LGBT Organisation )

### **5.1.3 Barriers to the commissioning process**

In generating a research agenda and in thinking through how this might progress, there was much discussion of the factors that may complicate the commissioning process. The overarching theme running throughout this discussion related to a general perception that homophobia or transphobia – articulated by public bodies, church, media and wider society - had contributed to an omission or exclusion until late, of LGBT concerns from the research and policy agenda. Organisational representatives repeatedly argued that – in their view - prejudice against LGBT people prevented public bodies and institutions from funding research on LGBT issues.

*'I think there is still discrimination within public bodies across Scotland and that's one of the factors which has meant that research hasn't happened in a lot of areas'* (Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation )

Discrimination was perceived by some to exist even within reputable research foundations and funding bodies. Consequently, it was judged that in the absence of enlightened professionals, that funding criteria often omitted any explicit interest in research on sexual orientation or transgender issues – though the same criteria may champion the need for research on other equality issues such as ethnicity. Participants who themselves had applied in vain for grants from public and academic institutions to fund research on LGBT issues argued that their experience of being denied funds led them to believe that research in this field was not viewed as being of 'institutional significance'.

Perceived homophobic attitudes articulated by the church in Scotland came in for particular criticism during discussions. It was acknowledged that church teachings still garnered a lot of support in Scotland and the transmission of derogatory attitudes towards LGBT people through the national media made life difficult in many ways, not least in attracting funding – including funding for research. Representatives felt it was usual for the Church to vilify any organisation giving money to LGBT causes and this was seen to engender a reluctance on behalf of funders to allocate resources towards LGBT research (and more broadly to LGBT services). On the whole, it was felt that funding agencies often avoided supporting LGBT issues in order to avoid negative publicity.

*PI: 18 months ago...we were granted £200 by [Region] Council for publicity just to keep the group running, the [newspaper] picked up on this and we*

*were front page headlines...They said they'd interviewed, in inverted commas, 'leaders of the church'.*

*Int: So do you feel this stops the research, or not?*

*PI: Definitely, I think it stops research, it stops grant aid. It stops our establishment as valid members of the wider community (Regional Group, Transgender Group )*

Organisational representatives suggested that church attitudes also had an effect on the willingness of political leaders to be seen to support LGBT initiatives – including research.

*'You know for any councillor to take a stand openly, publicly, and say that they support you know money being put into youth groups or something like that. You know it's suicide as far as the next local election's concerned, you know. So nobody is ever going to step forward on that and say 'Yes, this is what I agree with' (Regional Group, Gay Men's Group )*

A further perceived impediment to the commissioning of research concerned the visibility of the LGBT community in Scotland. Recurrent throughout discussions was the perception in many communities that LGBT people did not exist amongst them.

*'Because of the visibility, homophobia and repression, the whole thing. People just don't consider us, don't think we exist. We're invisible, we're not there' (Regional Group, LGBT Organisation)*

At a national level, sexual and gender identity were often thought to be omitted from considerations of diversity and equality. Thus, put simply, there was little perceived support – particularly at regional and local level - for the allocation of resources to research issues which was seen to affect few people (or, as mentioned previously, to provide services for them). This places LGBT communities in a somewhat impossible position given that the only way of proving to such commissioners and fund holders that the need for research exists is by conducting some research in the first place. This barrier was felt to be particularly evident in relation to research on transgender issues. It was suggested that there was a much greater lack of public and political understanding of the existence of transgender people in Scotland than there was of lesbian, gay or bisexual people and that this led to much less support for research on transgender issues.

Finally, the lack of research commissioned to date on LGBT issues was also attributed to a perceived low importance placed by politicians and policy makers on LGBT equality relative to other policy issues. Organisational representatives felt that, in the main, LGBT issues were situated way down any list of policy priorities and this meant that limited research resources went instead to what were considered to be more pressing or more politically expedient issues.

#### **5.1.4 Future commissioning**

In addition to identifying the barriers to commissioning research on LGBT issues, representatives were also encouraged to think through some of the solutions that would assist in getting the commissioning process right in the future. Here, strategies again emphasised a

leading role for the Scottish Executive. There was recurrent mention of the need for top-down support for LGBT research, in the way that consideration of many other equality groups is currently encouraged. It was hoped that this study of community research priorities would be a first step to the Executive adopting a more involved role in promoting research on LGBT issues, regardless of political cost. It was felt that such a stance could potentially legitimise LGBT research and lead other research funders and commissioners to begin to consider proposals on LGBT issues.

*'If there are people at a fairly high level saying 'We are doing this and we doing this because we support LGBT communities' people will be coming and doing this research and that's because at governmental level we strongly support you getting equal rights, then I think a lot of the barriers are going to start to come down'*  
(Central Belt Group, National LGBT organisation)

While some were content for the Executive to merely lead on and commission research on LGBT communities, others felt that some sort of policy statement or even legislative reform was necessary in order to protect and ensure that research on LGBT communities in Scotland does indeed take place – in the same way that research in relation to most other equality groups is a current priority. In this respect, simple encouragement from the Executive to conduct research on LGBT issues was viewed as not sufficient to guarantee that funders and commissioners would begin to take the research needs of the LGBT community on board. It was envisaged that such a measure would enable LGBT individuals and organisations to question funders and commissioners where they are seen not to support applications relating to LGBT issues.

*Int: How do we overcome [the barriers]?*

*P1: Part of it's leadership from the top, from the Scottish Executive.*

*P2: Part of it having that legal framework. There is then an issue thereafter, not just in terms of measuring effectiveness but also people standing up for the rights that they have under that legal framework. But it at least provides the framework within which something can happen'* (Central Belt Group, P1: National LGBT organisation, P2: Statutory Equalities Officer)

Wherever responsibility for commissioning should lie, there was a clear willingness amongst organisational representatives to be active contributors to the process – informing policymakers – and other commissioners – about community needs and priorities in relation to research.

## **5.2 The dissemination of research**

Having access to research on LGBT communities was considered important – not only for community organisations and LGBT people themselves but also for policy makers, funders, practitioners and other interested bodies or individuals. The wide dissemination of such research was felt to be a crucial way of educating the public and relevant institutions about LGBT life, and ultimately a way of challenging stereotypes and changing attitudes.

One of the key messages to emerge from this consultation with community organisations is the limited access that they feel they have to research on LGBT issues – and this was perceived to be considerably more problematic for those outside the LGBT community. While representatives felt that there was some sharing of relevant research between LGBT

organisations, this generally relied heavily on personal or professional relationships, rather than through any transparent or accessible system.

*'I mean it's a matter of knowing the individuals and that's what's very much relied on...It's people giving of their own time, scraping together wee bits here and there...It's a wing and a prayer and a tuppence ha'penny here and there'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Organisation)

Consequently, even within the group discussions, LGBT representatives expressed surprise and interest at hearing about particular research studies mentioned by other participants. This sparked considerable concern within the groups, for if LGBT organisations themselves were unable to access potentially helpful research, it was unlikely – in their view – that it would reach the attention of the appropriate policy maker, funder or service provider.

*'They're only accessible in the fact that they do get sent to us. But yes I think ... yeah they're [the Executive] very good at sending the information so it is accessible to us. But then again because there's no general resource in this area it's not accessible to the general public I don't think, should they wish to read it. And I know things like that are available maybe in libraries but again is it available in your local library? Do people know it's available in your local library?'* (Regional Group, LGBT Organisation )

With this in mind, there was a considerable mandate within the group discussions for greater accessibility to research on LGBT communities. There were a number of ways in which it was felt this should happen. For some, the role of public libraries as being valuable information points on LGBT issues, and archivists of LGBT research, were emphasised, particularly now that the repeal of Section 2a should quell any opposition from local authorities to such a plan. Equally, it was suggested that there was a role for a community organisation to take on the position of collating, archiving and disseminating research on LGBT issues – not just to researchers – but to the whole variety of potential interest groups outlined earlier. While some organisations of this ilk were said to exist already, they were felt to be limited by a lack of funds in the extent to which they could be national co-ordinators of LGBT research and information. Increased funding and support of such endeavours was seen as crucial in developing such services – and in turn widening access to LGBT research.

Collating and co-ordinating existing work was also believed to be of value in that it could provide a more holistic picture of LGBT lives in Scotland.

*'...there's you know little pockets of research being done here and there about people's experiences of violence of experiences in the health care system, but just more generally to know what...to tie all the stuff together, what our experiences of our lives are'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Organisation)

Equally, it was suggested that an audit of existing research, of whatever scale, would be an important prerequisite to the development of any future research agenda.

*'I think what would be useful is to find out what research there is...And you know so rather sit down and try and reinvent the wheel there is a case where you know quite a lot of work has already been done and it's how to pull that together'* (Central Belt Group, LGBT Organisation)

There was recurrent mention of the value of having on-line access to research on LGBT issues, and some felt that any attempt at co-ordinating existing research should also provide online access to information and research. This approach was seen to be of considerable value to smaller – usually voluntary based - LGBT organisations, and also to rural agencies - who felt that their capacity to access and digest relevant research was severely curtailed by a lack of funding or personnel.

The Executive was consistently portrayed as the linchpin to creating greater access to existing and future research and information on LGBT issues. By hosting effective dissemination strategies, or funding other agencies to carry out such tasks, organisational representatives perceived a key role for the Executive. However, this focus on the Executive should be understood in the context of a general lack of awareness of other potential sources of funding and support for these endeavours, such as public, charitable and academic research funding councils.

## 6 SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

This study has proved to be a very thorough consultation with LGBT organisational representatives about the future of both policy and research on LGBT issues in Scotland. This chapter reflects on the main conclusions of the research.

### 6.1 The development of policy on LGBT issues

Since its inception, the Executive has made considerable headway into thinking about how policy needs to be more inclusive of LGBT people. Documents like the Equality Strategy, and events such as the two thematic seminars on LGBT issues, where Ministers and civil servants have listened attentively to community concerns exemplify this. In addition, National LGBT organisations have clearly been involved in lobbying and briefing the Executive and the Scottish Parliament about LGBT matters. This consultation with LGBT organisations adds a further level of depth to those issues already known to the Executive and, hopefully, has unearthed other concerns that have not been voiced before in any previous forum with the Executive.

The organisational representatives have echoed and applauded the Executive's commitment to equality and inclusion set down in the Equality Strategy. In carrying this forward, discussions with community organisations have generated a plethora of specific concerns – across a wide range of policy areas. Issues such as homophobic bullying (in schools or in the workplace), the education of children on prejudice and discrimination and the importance of partnership rights to LGBT people – in addition to many others - call for policy change in specific areas of government. However, the study has also highlighted a set of broader policy issues, responsibility for which lies in no single area. These include the introduction of full equality in all aspects of law; the extension of social inclusion measures to address the concerns of LGBT people and the reform of public services to take full account of the needs and requirements of LGBT people. Other broader fundamental issues have also been put on the map – the importance of support for rural LGBT individuals and communities, and increased funding for LGBT community infrastructure throughout Scotland. These issues demonstrate LGBT people's wish for more fundamental change in the way that policy is made.

#### Key conclusions:

- **The discussions have highlighted a wide range of specific policy issues that need consideration by the Executive in its move to create a more equal society.**
- **There are also broader policy changes that are needed that cut across different departmental boundaries, and these require a co-ordinated response from Government.**

### 6.2 Creating a research agenda

Given the recurrent calls for widespread policy change, it is unsurprising therefore that this study has generated a broad and detailed research agenda. The topics suggested clearly underpin the broader aspiration for policy change in these areas, however, some notable policy issues are absent from the research agenda. These concern matters where, it was felt, that policy change was more important than research. They relate to issues deemed central to

the civil rights of LGBT people in Scotland: the right to be free from discrimination; safety from harassment and violence; and the ability to form partnerships and families – and to enjoy their concomitant benefits. However, there is also a view that some research may be needed on such issues to inform and facilitate change.

The research agenda generated communicates an overriding thirst for knowledge about LGBT life, experiences and circumstances. This is not merely to advance intellectual learning but is rooted in a need for validation of LGBT existence. Organisational representatives have emphasised that, while there are some uncharted areas of LGBT life, there is also considerable knowledge of LGBT existence in Scotland. However, research is seen as an important way of providing irrefutable evidence or proof to convince policy makers, funders and service providers why change is needed and how it should happen. Other values of research were also underscored – its role in community development, for example, and its contribution to the activities of support organisations. In this sense, the involvement of community organisations in the creation of a research agenda for LGBT issues was clearly valued by organisations and crucial to creating a more grounded and all encompassing programme of work.

#### **Key conclusions:**

- **There is a need for a broad programme of research to develop knowledge and understanding of LGBT people and communities.**
- **The active involvement of LGBT people and organisations in the creation of a research agenda should continue.**
- **Some areas of civil rights are seen to need immediate legal redress but research is also needed here to inform and facilitate change.**
- **Research can play a key role in LGBT community development and this should be better supported.**

### **6.3 Research methods**

The discussion of research methodologies with organisational representatives highlights the value of a pluralist approach. While quantitative data was seen as having greater legitimacy in the eyes of funders and policy makers, there was also a strong belief in the ability of qualitative approaches to tell the story of LGBT experience and circumstance more effectively. There was also concern voiced about the quality and competence of existing research (seen in part to arise from the limited resources to carry out robust enquiries and difficulties in reaching all LGBT people). Consequently, there was considerable emphasis placed on the need for validity and reliability in any future research enquiries.

The issue of who was best placed to conduct research on LGBT issues was a source of much discussion. Despite opposing views about whether researchers should be indigenous to the communities or from outwith, there was consensus on the qualities required of a researcher or research organisation. In this sense, the importance of independence, objectivity and sensitivity were emphasised. Such issues are similar to those raised by other equality groups – such as disabled people and minority ethnic populations – and there has been in the past twenty years a greater acknowledgement within policy research of the centrality of the community researcher. Future researchers clearly need to understand that in the same manner as it is important to meet the language or access needs of a respondent, it is important for any researchers on LGBT issues to have a keen grasp of LGBT culture and to adapt their research methodologies in response to this.

The participation of LGBT people in any research was also seen to be an issue of key importance. A number of barriers were highlighted by representatives – perhaps the most important being the difficulty in accessing all LGBT people in Scotland and developing representative survey samples. Here, it was argued that homophobia/transphobia and a legacy of exclusion – matters at the core of any policy development on LGBT issues – were significant challenges to research that might inform such policy development. Thus, the difficulty of capturing the entire LGBT experience was seen as jeopardising the conduct of robust research. Representatives did signpost a number of strategies for overcoming this, including the need for more effective communication of the confidentiality, guaranteeing anonymity in any future research and providing better evidence that research can and does influence policy.

#### **Key conclusions:**

- **All future research on LGBT issues commissioned should be robust in the methods used.**
- **There is value in both qualitative and quantitative research – each brings different strengths to communicating the full spectrum of LGBT experience.**
- **There was no clear consensus on who is best to conduct LGBT research – but the qualities of independence, objectivity and sensitivity were considered crucial.**
- **The fear of homophobia or transphobia and a legacy of exclusion are key barriers to overcome in getting LGBT people to participate in research. Overcoming these is an essential component of any research effort.**

#### **6.4 Co-ordinating research**

Finally, organisational representatives clearly see the need for better co-ordination of existing and future LGBT research in Scotland. This was emphasised in two ways. First the commissioning of research is one area that was felt could benefit from a more harmonised approach. There was great emphasis placed on the Executive as the body best placed to take on this position. However, there was also seen to be a key role for LGBT organisations in informing this role, developing research priorities and being involved in both advising and conducting LGBT research. However, representatives were not oblivious to the challenges that any body commissioning research on LGBT issues would encounter – which were seen to have their base in prejudice, homophobia, invisibility and limited political support.

The second co-ordinating role envisaged by organisational representatives was one that would direct the dissemination of research on LGBT issues. There was felt to be insufficient access, even to the paucity of Scottish research currently in existence. The importance of having a central point of contact for community organisations, service providers, funders, and policy makers was recurrently underscored. It was hoped that better dissemination of research findings would lead to more enlightened policy and practice and a more informed general public, which ultimately – it was hoped – could challenge stereotypes and change public attitudes. There was no clear conclusion as to who should take on this dissemination role. While some felt that the Executive was best placed, others favoured the location of such a body within the LGBT community.

#### **Key conclusions:**

- **There is a clear need for better co-ordination of existing and any future research on LGBT issues**

- **There should be a more harmonised approach to commissioning research on LGBT issues – within and outwith Government**
- **More effective dissemination to individuals, community organisations, service providers, funders and policy makers is key to utilising the full value of research conducted on LGBT issues.**

## **6.5 Further development of the research agenda**

As outlined in Chapter One, one of the functions of this study was to inform a final component of research with policy makers within National and Local Government. The proposed aim of this was to understand their data needs in relation to LGBT issues in Scotland. It was anticipated that this study would focus on policy areas prioritised by LGBT organisations (in this current study) and, within these areas, develop an understanding from policy makers about what they would need to know in order to bring about policy change. However, the request to prioritise was viewed by organisational representatives to be inappropriate. It was feared that any attempt to prioritise certain issues would be at the opportunity cost of others. Equally, representatives felt it difficult to give any conclusive set of priorities because of the competing influences of the personal, organisational and political sphere.

Given the lack of agreed priorities, options for the final phase of this research will now be discussed with the project advisory group, in order to decide on how to best build upon the findings of phases 1 and 2.

## **APPENDIX I - ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH**

- Aberdeen University LGBT Officer
- Ab Fab (Aberdeen Uni LGBT Soc)
- Beyond Barriers
- Bi-Glasgow
- City Of Edinburgh Equalities Unit
- Diverse Arts
- DiversiTay
- Edinburgh LGBT Community Safety Forum
- Edinburgh Lesbian Mother's Group
- EIS - L&G Committee
- Equality Network
- Gay Men's Health
- Glasgow LGBT Centre
- Glasgow University LGBT Society
- Glasgow Women's Library
- Grampian LGB Switchboard
- Grampian Gender Group
- Healthy Gay Scotland
- Highland Lesbian group
- Highland T group
- Lesbian mothers network Scotland
- LGBT Archive Project
- Lothian Switchboard
- Outright Scotland
- NE Scotland LGBT Forum
- NE Scotland Gay Men's Group
- NUS Scotland LGB Committee
- Out and Proud
- Paisley Uni LGB Soc
- Phace Grampian
- Phace West
- Queen Margaret University LGBT soc
- Reach Out Highland
- Reach Out Highland Youth Group
- Steve Retson Project
- Stonewall Scotland
- Stonewall Youth project
- Strathclyde Uni LGB Soc
- Transalba
- LIPs
- Unison L&G group

## APPENDIX II – TOPIC GUIDE

### EXPLORING THE NEED FOR POLICY RESEARCH IN LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND

#### Stage Two: Topic guide for interviews with representatives of LGBT organisations in Scotland

Stage Two involves interviews with as many representatives as possible of the (approximately) eighty or so LGBT organisations identified by the Equality Network as established in Scotland. The aims of the research are:

- to explore what are considered as policy priority areas by the representatives
- to identify what data needs are required by LGBT organisations
- to understand current dissemination and accessing of data on LGBT communities by LGBT organisations
- to elicit perspectives on potential barriers to collection of data on LGBT communities
- to gather ideas and suggestions for the way forward

Remind about:    the National Centre (Scotland presence)  
                          Scottish Executive commission/ Equality Network involvement  
                          Focus on research/data needs  
                          Tape recorder, confidentiality, use of flipchart

#### 1. Background information

- Organisation represented
- Community represented by the organisation
- Remit of the organisation (including key goals, geographical area covered)
- Respondent's role within the organisation and how long in this role

#### 2. Policy priorities and concomitant data needs

*Purpose here is to examine perceptions and potential of establishing research priorities for LGBT communities in Scotland. Previous Thematic Seminar findings displayed on flipchart to stimulate group discussion of LGBT research priorities.*

- Specific policy areas and issues viewed most pressing/ necessary (flipchart collation)
- Nature of issues
- How issue manifested/ effects of existing policy around issue on LGBT communities
- Possibility of developing priority order to issues
- Issues viewed greater or lesser priorities; reasons why
- Perceived current barriers to addressing these issues

### **3. Data needs in relation to identified LGBT issues**

*Purpose here is to generate discussion around current data on LGBT communities and data gaps*

- Existing data on LGBT issues identified
  - sources of existing research
  - availability
  - usefulness/Adequacy
  - explore views about competence of existing research methods
  - identify models of good practice/most useful
- LGBT issues requiring further data
  - Kinds and types of data required (e.g. survey, qualitative, longitudinal etc)
  - Explore why different types of data needed (e.g. community development, campaigns, lobbying, others..)
  - What would data/research contribute to communities/policy development
  - What data is most needed (again try to establish priority)
  - Responsibility for commissioning/funding research

### **4. Current use and access to data on LGBT communities**

*Purpose here is to understand how current data on LGBT communities is used, shared and accessed by LGBT organisations in Scotland and any emergent data gaps*

- General awareness of sources of information/research on LGBT issues in Scotland for:
  - planning services
  - planning campaigns
  - planning training programmes
- Views about adequacy of these services
- Current sources of information used by organisations (primary and secondary sources, in house and external)
- Extent and nature of sharing between LGBT organisations in Scotland of:
  - research expertise
  - research data
  - research findings
- How this sharing occurs LGBT organisations occurs, if at all (for all three research levels, above)
- Perceived gaps in information on LGBT issues
- Implications of information gaps on:
  - services provided by LGBT organisations
  - on LGBT communities more generally

### **5. Barriers and facilitators to the collection and availability of data on sexual orientation**

*Purpose here is to establish those factors perceived as hindering or helping collection and dissemination of data on LGBT communities in Scotland*

- Extent to which current data collection on LGBT communities in Scotland is sufficient
- If not, barriers and difficulties experienced/ identified in such data collection (including perceived priority attached to the issue; methodological difficulties, etc.)
- Reasons for barriers
- Steps to be taken to overcome barriers
- Preferred methods for collecting data on LGBT issues
  - any useful examples/lessons
  - any principles

#### ***6. Looking to the future***

- Suggestions for the way forward/ messages to take back to policy makers

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