



THE SOCIETY OF PENSION
PROFESSIONALS
making pensions work

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:
LGBTQ+

The Society of Pension Professionals
& Stonewall

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Pride and Prejudice: LGBTQ+ in the UK today

By Simon Blake, Chief Executive, Stonewall

The context in which the Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer + (LGBTQ+) community are living is very different than when I was growing up gay in the 80s. In the United Kingdom there has been significant and positive social change, including legal protections from discrimination and harassment in the workplace that didn't exist at the end of the 20th Century.

Where we are today

ILGA Europe publishes an annual ranking based on the legislative and policy framework for LGBTQ+ people. The UK has slipped from first place to 22/49 in a decade. Whilst some of that is because the rankings are more inclusive of intersex and trans+ people, it reflects a wider picture of social, health and economic inequality and prejudice that still remains for LGBTQ+ people.

For example, in 2024, the Trevor Project found that 66% of LGBTQ+ young people reported discrimination owing to sexual orientation, and 68% owing to gender identity. The report outlines the impact on adolescent mental health. This is reflected in disparities in mental health outcomes across all age groups. The Office for National Statistics reported there were c.28,000 LGBTQ+ hate crimes reported in 2023/24. Our own research found that under half of LGBTQ+ people feel confident to hold their partner's hand in public.

Family life

Whilst marriage equality has been on the statute for just over a decade, our community has, through both necessity and desire, been creating different types of intimate and family relationships for much longer. Societal attitudes are shifting too when it comes to having children.

Whilst many more people from the LGBTQ+ community are having children, there are significant hurdles including stigma, legislation, policy and cost affecting the real choices available. As a society we do not focus much attention to the stories of older people in public discourse. There are even fewer stories about older people from the LGBTQ+ community and our experiences of growing older.

The workplace

A 2024 report published by the Trade Union Congress found over half of respondents had experienced at least one form of bullying or harassment at work in the last five years. Around one in five respondents had been exposed to verbal abuse about LGBT+ people in the workplace, and 5% reported experiencing physical violence, threats and intimidation. Consequently 29% aren't open about their identity at work.

Financial affairs

So, despite overall progress, a clear picture of inequality remains which flows through to financial inequality and a LGBTQ+ pensions gap. It is against this backdrop that we are planning our futures.

In the pensions industry, there is a recognition of thinking carefully about equity and inclusion in carrying out their duties. The Pensions Regulator has produced guidance on the topic.

Here are three simple and effective things you can do:

- > Be curious - learn about the history and lives of LGBTQ+ people to help build rapport and have open conversations to facilitate decision making. For example, we may have done our financial planning independently even if we are married because we internalised stories that our relationships don't last; we didn't need to plan together because we didn't have children, we may not have thought about a pension until later in life because we didn't expect to grow old or we may be planning for an old age that doesn't match our hopes and dreams.
- > Reflect the diversity of our lives in your scheme information – the words and the imagery.
- > Make sure the paperwork is inclusive and enables us to reflect the diversity of our identities and our personal and family relationship structures.



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Visible, open, engaging

By Savannah Adeniyi, Solicitor, Travers Smith LLP and SPP member

Prior to starting my legal career, I lived across London, Lagos, and Luton before studying English Literature at Cambridge. I've also squeezed in brief stints as a Vicar's assistant, data protection adviser to a social action centre, and even as a ghostwriter!

I really enjoy practicing Pensions law. It combines my love for complex analysis with the satisfying challenge of working in an area of law which – to the surprise of many – is constantly changing and developing. Pensions is a highly technical area of law, but has a real impact on the lives of everyday people and maintaining a strong awareness of this is critical to the service that I provide to my clients. So much of my work is directly member-focussed, whether I am advising my trustee clients on their discretionary powers or helping them consider complex member complaints.

As a queer black woman, and as someone who largely grew up in council homes, I'm very familiar with a sense of being 'other' in most of the spaces that I find myself in. Most of us have experienced this in some way, though for me it is often a particularly acute feeling in respect of my queer identity. Unfortunately, this doesn't magically go away when you first 'come out' as a queer person, because most of us have to come out again and again every day in some form, and in multiple spaces.

It is incredibly important to me to be visible and open about the various aspects of my identity and how they intersect, and about my experiences, especially as I know that it is sometimes difficult for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to see themselves in professional roles like mine. It is equally important for people of all backgrounds to engage with articles like this one, and to keep the conversation going about underrepresentation, and discrimination, across professional industries.

My queer identity has been welcomed throughout my career in a way that I know many LGBT+ professionals did not experience at the start of theirs. Attitudes towards LGBT+ people have improved so much in the UK, and I'm fortunate to have benefitted from this – I'm particularly lucky to work at a firm as inclusive and welcoming as Travers Smith. But even as recently as the mid-2010s, I remember being advised to seriously consider going back into the closet if I wanted to get my foot in the door of a career in law. While I've never experienced that specific barrier, I've certainly had my own share of uncomfortable conversations, particularly as a queer woman who doesn't always dress in a traditionally gender-conforming way. I also know many LGBT+ people who have encountered 'glass ceilings' in their workspace. While I can completely be myself at my current firm, the unfortunate reality is that there are still far too many workspaces in which people are not able to be open and out for fear of a genuine risk to their careers – yes, even in multinational law firms in the City of London. That is a deep shame, and it isn't made any easier by some of the political headwinds that the LGBT+ community continues to face.

However, despite this, I feel incredibly positive about inclusive trends in the legal industry as a whole. I'm a proud member of O:Pen, the pensions industry group which focusses on issues which affect LGBT+ individuals, and which seeks to deliver thought pieces relevant to the wider industry. So many firms have made great, and importantly, genuine strides in actively addressing the barriers that many LGBT+ lawyers still face in the legal workspace. The proper measure of diversity and inclusion is in actions, not words. Even with a change in climate, I know that many firms remain committed to ensuring outdated attitudes are not a barrier to attracting the best talent across the spectrum.

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