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## WORKING FOR LESBIAN & GAY RIGHTS



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## Introduction

**R**ights for lesbians and gay men—both as NALGO members and as users of the services NALGO members provide—are the proper concern of everyone in NALGO. Fighting discrimination against any members of the community, and securing fair representation for all union members, are intrinsic to the principles of trade unionism.

That is why this handbook is not solely addressed to lesbian and gay activists within NALGO, though some chapters will undoubtedly be of greater interest to such activists. It is also intended for use by all branch officers, and particularly anyone involved in negotiating improvements in pay or conditions for our members. Lesbians and gay men experience discrimination in a variety of ways, as employees, as service users and even as NALGO members; this handbook is intended to indicate ways in which such discrimination can be ended.

### Self-organisation

Self-organisation is the key to combatting discrimination successfully, and NALGO is firmly committed to the principles of self-organisation. Currently there are four self-organising groups within the union: lesbian and gay members, women members, black members and members with disabilities.

'The basic principle of self-organisation,' a resolution passed at the 1989 Lesbian and Gay Conference noted, 'is that structurally disadvantaged groups democratically determine their own structures, as autonomous yet integral and accountable parts of the union.' NALGO's National Disability Committee has defined self-organisation further as 'the method by which groups of people facing discrimination within the union are empowered by their own activity within the union. It is a process which broadens the total perspective of the union as a whole...'

Each self-organised group within NALGO

has a national committee and annual conference. The union provides resources for groups to meet at branch, district and national level, both to make personal links and to develop policies and strategies to implement them. The degree of organisation in branches and districts varies round the country, the ideal being fully resourced branch and district groups, with representatives on the key decision-making bodies at that level.

Because of the particular discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men, many find it impossible to 'come out'—that is, be open about their sexuality—particularly at work. An added dimension for lesbian and gay self-organisation therefore is the need to ensure that it is possible for lesbians and gay men to take part in it without needing to 'come out'. This demands both sensitivity, such as keeping confidence about a workplace colleague, and flexibility—a branch might for example need to pay for an outside venue because holding a meeting in the branch office or workplace could deter some lesbians and gay men from attending.

### Making demands

The handbook suggests an approach to the kind of issues negotiators should be addressing, rather than providing exhaustive checklists; local conditions may suggest different solutions. The key here is consultation with lesbian and gay groups and members in NALGO, who will know better than anyone what to aim for.

Some of the suggestions for negotiators may seem utopian in the present economic and employment climate. Though it may be harder to achieve these demands, they should still be on any negotiator's agenda. Indeed, once an employer accepts lesbian and gay rights in principle, many of the measures needed to put this principle into practice may simply involve extending existing employment conditions to ensure they cover all staff.



## About this handbook

This handbook was commissioned by NALGO's National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee and is a revised version of the *Lesbian and Gay Organising Pack* which NALGO published in 1985. It addresses three main issues:

- ▼ improving equality of opportunity and conditions of service for the thousands of NALGO's members who are lesbian or gay (Chapter 1)
- ▼ ensuring that the services NALGO members provide reach all members of the public, including lesbians and gay men, on an equal basis (Chapter 2)
- ▼ lesbian and gay organising within NALGO (Chapters 3 and 4).

Chapter 5, *Black lesbians and gay men*, and Chapter 6, *Lesbians and gay men with disabilities*, cover aspects of all three issues.

The *Contacts* chapter lists a selection of lesbian and gay organisations, concentrating at a local level on helplines and switchboards which will have up to date contact lists of their own.

A handbook of this size cannot attempt a comprehensive analysis of the discrimination experienced by lesbians and gay men in society as a whole; instead it concentrates on practical measures for change in the three areas outlined above. The exceptions are Chapters 5 and 6, where the particular discriminations against black lesbians and gay men and lesbians and gay men with disabilities are described more fully to give a context to the practical suggestions.

Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6 were drafted by Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights (LAGER), a multi-cultural voluntary organisation which provides information, advice and support on all aspects of discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men in and out of work. Thanks are due to all those members of the National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee and NALGO officers who read and commented on all or part of the handbook in draft. Particular thanks to organising assistants Carola Towle and Denise Pallis, as well as Steve Bedser, co-ordinator of the NLGCC publicity sub-committee 1990-91, who oversaw the final draft.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Equal opportunities at work

**T**rade unions exist to protect the interests of their members and, by recruitment, to try and extend that protection to all workers. They have a duty to ensure that the interests of all those members or potential members are equally represented, which means taking into account the interests of all those in the community who face discrimination. Discrimination should be actively opposed by all trade unionists: it divides workers and such divisions can be exploited by employers.

A primary goal for trade unionists is to ensure that all members are protected in their jobs and are free from harassment, whether by employers or co-workers. One way to work towards this goal is to negotiate comprehensive equal opportunities policies (EOPs) with employers.

This chapter gives advice on the basic issues to consider when negotiating equality of opportunity for lesbians and gay men. An important background to formulating such policy, however, is an understanding of the position of lesbians and gay men under current employment law.

## EMPLOYMENT LAW

Few trade union members will need to be reminded of the onslaught on workers' rights of the last decade. This erosion of rights has compounded problems for lesbians and gay men, who were already vulnerable. People have been sacked, demoted and refused employment or promotion effectively on the grounds that they were lesbian or gay. Although it is possible to claim unfair dismissal at an industrial tribunal, a number of factors make it difficult for lesbians and gay men to take cases and, of those that have, few have been successful.

## The two year rule

There is no specific protection for lesbians and gay men under employment law. In

common with other workers, lesbians and gay men must have worked for two years continuously with the same employer to qualify for a case of unfair dismissal, or five years if they work less than 16 and more than eight hours per week. These qualifying periods do not apply to people taking cases on grounds of discrimination because of race, sex or trade union membership.

The qualifying period is a major obstacle for lesbians and gay men who are discriminated against on account of their sexuality. While it is hard for anyone to prove there has been discrimination at recruitment stage, including when discrimination has occurred against women or on grounds of race or trade union membership, lesbians and gay men have no statutory rights to protect them even when an employer is demonstrably homophobic.

Homophobic employers or co-workers who know or suspect that an employee is lesbian or gay will frequently take action against them before they have been employed for two years.

## Tríibunal bias

When lesbians and gay men have taken cases of discrimination to industrial tribunals, the tribunal has rarely been sympathetic. The following cases are just a few examples of the anti-lesbian and gay bias that both industrial tribunals and the Employment Appeals Tribunals (EATs) have shown in the past.

▼ In 1979 a maintenance worker at a youth camp was dismissed after two years' employment simply because he was gay. There had been no complaints against him from the staff, the young people at the camp or their parents, but the decision to sack him was upheld both by an industrial tribunal and the EAT. The EAT stated that: 'The tribunal were entitled to find that a considerable proportion of employers would take the view that the employment of a homosexual should be restricted,



particularly when required to work in proximity and contact with children. Whether that view is scientifically sound may be open to question but there was clear evidence... that it exists as a fact.'

▼ An accounts clerk was fired in 1977 for wearing a badge with the slogan 'lesbians ignite'. Both the industrial tribunal and the EAT considered that the badge could reasonably be considered to cause offence to the public, although no-one had complained. The EAT held that: 'A balance must be struck between the interests of the business and the reasonable freedom of the employee. It is within an employer's discretion to instruct the employee not to wear symbols which he considers on reasonable reflection to be potentially offensive to customers and employees.'

▼ In 1987 a data processor at GCHQ was suspended from his job after telling his management he was gay. The case went to the High Court, where GCHQ argued that his homosexuality made him 'vulnerable to pressure or blackmail by hostile intelligence services'. The judges paid tribute to his courage and integrity but ruled that the decision to suspend him was a matter totally at the discretion of the director of GCHQ.

Tribunals and EAT have not always ruled in favour of the employer and it is important to note that trade union representation can help lesbians and gay men to win cases of unfair dismissal. The following cases represent moves in the right direction.

▼ In 1976, a local authority senior social worker was dismissed because of a consensual 'offence'—a gross indecency incident occurring completely outside the area of his work. Winning a verdict of unfair dismissal at a tribunal, the man's NALGO branch was prominent in the campaign to reinstate him—the first strike approved nationally by a trade union in support of a gay worker sacked on grounds of sexuality. Significantly, though, the tribunal pointed out that the man's post was 'mainly administrative', and on returning to work he had to give an undertaking not to work with clients.

▼ In 1987 a senior cinema projectionist was sacked on the grounds that the part-time relief projectionists refused to work with

him because he was gay. His colleagues maintained that they might develop AIDS because they were working with him. Citing the 1979 case above as a precedent, the tribunal ruled that the dismissal was fair. Subsequently, the EAT advised that the tribunal were wrong to uphold the dismissal as reasonable, on the basis, however, that the company had failed to follow procedures correctly. It did not comment on discrimination as an unfair reason for dismissal.

▼ In 1988 a gay man was sacked from a factory in York because he had been convicted of 'gross indecency'. At a pre-tribunal hearing in Leeds, the employers were advised that it was unlikely for the dismissal to be upheld by the tribunal and they decided to settle out of court.

▼ A woman who worked with young people was sacked and took her case to a tribunal. While her lesbianism was not a major factor in her complaint of unfair dismissal it was mentioned in the case. The tribunal found in her favour and also remarked: 'We do not think in these days that the fact a person is a lesbian necessarily prohibits them from work in the line the applicant is in'. This case at least contradicts the others which imply that lesbians and gay men are unsuitable to work with young people.

In the absence of legal protection it should be the responsibility of employers and trade unions to ensure protection for lesbians and gay men in their employment or search for it. An effective EOP, which specifically includes lesbians and gay men, can go a long way in providing such protection. The provision of a comprehensive EOP by an employer is important not only to existing staff, but also to potential employees.

## POLICY GUIDELINES

NALGO members work for a wide range of employers and have already made important headway with many of them by negotiating comprehensive policies for their members. The following guidelines may help NALGO branches negotiate with employers who have not yet developed any policies for lesbians and gay men but it is also important for negotiators to involve their lesbian and gay members in developing such policies.

## General policy statement

A starting point is to secure the employer's commitment to challenging and opposing discrimination against lesbians and gay men. A clause stating such commitment should be included in any general policy statement which declares that the employer operates an equal opportunities policy. The statement should name all the groups covered by the policy and affirm positive action to challenge discrimination.

Lesbians and gay men should preferably be mentioned by name in the policy rather than using the terms 'sexual orientation', 'sexuality' or 'sexual preference'. Even if a term such as 'sexuality' is assumed to refer to same sex relationships, it still fails to distinguish between lesbians and gay men.

A good example of a comprehensive policy statement is the one adopted by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham: 'This Council is committed to ensuring that it provides equal opportunities in employment. The aim of the policy is to ensure that no job applicant or employee is discriminated against because of their sex, marital status, responsibilities for children or dependants, ethnic or national origins, race, colour, religious or political beliefs, age, employment status, class, trade union activities, because of a disability, because they are a lesbian or a gay man, or because of unrelated criminal convictions.'

Another group which is discriminated against but which the above example does not mention is people affected by HIV, discussed further below.

## Promoting the policy

The policy statement should be circulated to all members of staff and where applicable to any members of the public served by the organisation. Guidance accompanying the statement should make clear that the policy affects all staff. For example, Kirklees Metropolitan Council EOP unit give the following advice:

'The statement is being issued to ensure that all employees are aware of the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and the steps taken by the Council to monitor and review it. It is vital that all individuals who are employed by the Authority appreciate that they have a responsibility and a role to play

in the promotion of equal opportunities. This is particularly so in the day to day relationships which are developed at work between employees and between employees and users of the council. The support and co-operation of each employee for the measures now being adopted by the Council is essential to the elimination of discrimination against all sectors of both the work and wider community. The policy statement has the full support of the Kirklees trade unions.'

## The development of policy

When a statement of commitment has been secured it is important to encourage the employer to back the statement with policy documents detailing the strategies to be used to fight each form of discrimination identified in the policy statement. Any policy on lesbians and gay men should be integral to the overall EOP and its development.

## Employment protection

It is important for an EOP to stress that lesbians and gay men will receive the same protection in employment as other employees. This protection should cover recruitment, promotion, training or transfer, terms and conditions of service and dismissal.

A section of Hammersmith and Fulham Council's EOP summarises some of the issues for lesbians and gay men in relation to employment protection. It states:

'The Council recognises the oppression of lesbians and gay men and notes the nature of the discrimination is more complicated by the fact that lesbians and gay men are not necessarily identifiable. It acknowledges that heterosexism (that is, the means by which the oppression is maintained, exemplified by the notion that heterosexuality and heterosexual behaviour is superior to any other form of sexuality) is actively endorsed at all levels of public life. It is committed to working against this oppression, and therefore to strategies in employment practice which counteract discrimination and prejudice in all its forms against lesbians and gay men.'

'Lesbian and gay male applicants who are open about their sexuality are currently unlikely to be offered employment and promotion even when in every way they would be suited for the job. This Council will



ensure that lesbians and gay men who are open about their sexuality will be given the same priority for jobs as applicants from other groups which are at present under-represented in the Council's service.

'Most lesbians and gay men are unable to be open about their sexuality and are forced in some cases into lying and covering-up for fear of possible reprisals from other workers, management or members of the public. The right of lesbians and gay men to be open about their sexuality will be respected in all cases.'

## RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Many traditional methods used for recruitment and promotion, such as the use of interviews, personal records and references, are subject to the bias and prejudice of individuals. An EOP should commit an organisation to revising their recruitment procedures.

For example, North West Thames Regional Health Authority's EOP states that: 'Selection criteria and procedures will be periodically reviewed to ensure that individuals are selected, promoted and treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities. All employees will be given equal opportunity and, where appropriate, special training to enable them to progress within the National Health Service.'

Ideally, all recruitment and promotion procedures should use objective criteria for the selection of candidates based solely on the ability to do the job. Trade union negotiators can play a crucial role by persuading employers to adopt recruitment and promotion procedures which follow a standard plan devised to minimise personal bias.

Trade union members will also, however, want to encourage organisations to make their workforce representative of all the different people in the community at large, including lesbians and gay men, and to achieve that representation at all levels of the organisation.

Ensuring that certain members of staff are delegated responsibility for new recruitment policies is one way of securing implementation of policy. For example, South West Regional Health Authority's policy states: 'It is the responsibility of the Regional Personnel Officer to continually review

employment practices with a view to ensuring that there is no unfair discrimination in any selection process. The Regional Personnel Officer will provide such information and guidance as is necessary to assist in the application of the policy.'

## Recruitment panels

Negotiators can encourage the employer to use recruitment panels which comprise people who are trained not only in recruitment procedures but also in all aspects of equal opportunities; this training should include issues of relevance to lesbians and gay men.

## Advertising

Advertisements affect who applies for a job, so it is important that employers advertise all jobs as an Equal Opportunities Employer. Jobs should be advertised widely and aim to reach groups covered by the EOP. One way of achieving this is to advertise in publications relevant to those groups, for example, for women, black people, lesbians and gay men and people with disabilities. Specific groups could also be targeted by using the mailing lists of organisations which serve the groups mentioned in the policy.

## Application forms

The job application forms and information enclosed should explain the equal opportunities policies of the organisation, including the groups covered by the policy. Information accompanying application forms should make it clear that fair consideration will be given to any relevant lesbian and gay related paid or voluntary work. Such information should be treated as confidential and given the same consideration as any other relevant work experience.

Application forms should only ask for information which is relevant to the job. Thus, for example, there should be no need to name 'next of kin': information on whom to contact in case of emergency may become relevant after appointment and can be collected at this point.

Information required for monitoring purposes should be clearly marked as such and collected separately on a voluntary basis.

## Interviews

Techniques used to avoid discrimination against lesbians and gay men at the interview stage will be similar to those used to try and eradicate any form of interviewer bias. Thus questions should concentrate solely on the candidate's ability to perform the job; post interview assessment should be based solely on this ability; the recruitment panel should avoid asking questions which explicitly or implicitly ask the candidate about their sexuality.

## References and records

References and personal records should be treated with caution. A bad reference may result from an employer's prejudice.

## Personal and police records

There are several criminal 'offences' which gay men can be charged with for which there are no heterosexual equivalents and others, such as the Public Order Act, which may be used in a discriminatory way against lesbians and gay men (see Chapter 2). In addition, the police will often notify employers of the name and address of a person convicted of a gay offence, however small, and even sometimes take an employer's name and address without charges being brought. If an individual works with young people, for example, they are obliged to do so. Employers should be urged to take and publicise the view that such 'offences' bear no relation to an individual's capacity to do their job in a proper and professional manner.

After periods between six months and ten years (depending on the level of the sentence) most convictions for many people will be regarded as 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, that is they do not have to be disclosed to anyone including employers. However there are a number of occupations for which all convictions, including 'spent' ones, must be declared to employers. These include: anyone working with or having substantial access to children up to 18; medical practitioners and nurses; the legal profession; certified and chartered accountants; members of social services departments providing services to people over 65, with

mental or physical disabilities, suffering from serious illness, or addicted to alcohol or drugs; and some youth workers.

Employers should be urged to adopt a non-discriminatory approach if any 'spent' convictions are disclosed which have been received for wholly consensual 'crimes' with no heterosexual equivalent. Policy documents on equal opportunities should therefore state that personnel or police records which report criminal offences with no heterosexual equivalent will be ignored.

The EOP of the London Borough of Islington states, for example: 'Where a member of staff is convicted of an offence arising solely by reason of his/her homosexuality (which would not be considered an offence for heterosexuals), it shall not be treated as an offence for the general purpose of section H(i) of the Staff Code—it may not be necessary to report details of the matter to their Chief Officer. However, in circumstances where the law requires the Council to keep records of offences, section H(i)2 shall apply to enable a record to be kept.'

## OTHER ISSUES

### Openness and confidentiality

One of the ways in which the oppression lesbians and gay men experience differs from other types of oppressions is that it is not always obvious who is lesbian or gay. Some lesbians and gay men may choose not to be open about their sexuality at work. People who experience other forms of discrimination in addition to homophobia may find it even harder to be openly lesbian or gay. Black lesbians and gay men, for example, who constantly face racism, may find their problems compounded if they are open about their sexuality with co-workers.

While policy should state clearly that people have the right to be openly lesbian or gay at work, it is equally important to recognise the right for lesbians and gay men not to have their sexuality disclosed, without permission, by others in the organisation.

The assurance of confidentiality should also be given to both the organisation's employees and service users. As a simple rule, disclosing an employee's or user's sexuality to anyone else is only permissible



with the explicit informed consent of the individual concerned.

In most circumstances breaches of confidentiality should be considered a disciplinary offence. This is especially important when such a breach has led to the victimisation or harassment of a lesbian or gay man by other members of staff.

## Grievance and disciplinary procedures

Ignorance and fear are at the root of why people discriminate against lesbians and gay men. It is, however, crucial to protect lesbians and gay men, and others who suffer discrimination. Employers should be urged to state clearly in their grievance and disciplinary procedures that being harassed for reasons related to sexuality provides a genuine basis for complaint and that such harassment will be considered a disciplinary offence.

Equally, stewards and other union representatives should make it clear to members that they will receive full support in taking out a grievance if they are being harassed by other staff because of their sexuality.

Islington Council's EOP includes a section on harassment which states:

'Harassment includes unreciprocated and unwelcome comments, looks, actions, materials, suggestions or physical contact that is found objectionable and/or offensive and may create an intimidating working environment.

'Discrimination including harassment and victimisation on the grounds of race, sex, disability, sexuality, age or religious belief will be viewed as a disciplinary offence. Serious cases may constitute gross misconduct resulting in immediate suspension followed by summary dismissal by the Council.

'This Council will not condone any harassment of any employee within the Council, whether these acts are committed by members of the public or by colleagues. Nor will the Council condone any acts of harassment by employees against members of the public. The Council is committed to grievance, disciplinary and other Staff Code procedures which will provide proper redress.'

The National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee is currently developing its own guidelines on harassment.

## HIV

The advent of HIV has increased discrimination against gay men and sometimes lesbians too: fear and ignorance about the condition fuel existing prejudice. Some organisations include HIV under policies on disability; we suggest, however, that trade unions should negotiate separate policy on HIV. While HIV has brought with it a unique form of discrimination, it is an issue for everyone and policy should reflect this. Issues to consider include:

- ▼ a policy of no discrimination against employees or job applicants who are HIV positive
- ▼ no employee or job applicant to be required to take an HIV antibody test
- ▼ normal practice concerning sick leave and pay
- ▼ employees who are HIV positive not be dismissed
- ▼ provision of any necessary support and arrangements to enable the person to continue work
- ▼ employees not to be redeployed to alternative employment except at their request
- ▼ employees not to be prevented from continuing work unless they are medically unfit
- ▼ employees who are HIV positive not to be required to inform their employer
- ▼ if the fact that an employee is HIV positive becomes known, strict confidentiality to be maintained
- ▼ referral to outside counselling services and paid leave to attend them
- ▼ consideration to be given for special leave for those responsible for caring for people with AIDS related diseases
- ▼ harassment of or discrimination against employees who are HIV positive to be included in grievance and disciplinary procedures
- ▼ training and education for all staff in issues relating to HIV.

## Service users

NALGO members work for employers providing services to the public and an effective EOP should extend to service users

as well as employees. Service provision is discussed further in Chapter 2.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Written policies on equal opportunities can be of little or no use unless measures are taken to ensure that the policies are put into practice. If one of the key reasons for hostility towards lesbians and gay men is ignorance and fear, then training and information will be amongst the most effective ways of challenging such hostility.

## Training

Training should be conducted with the assistance of lesbian and gay trainers. A first measure is to ensure that all employees are aware of the content of the EOP. Many practices will need to be modified or changed with the introduction of an EOP and staff will need to be trained in the new methods and procedures. Training should be designed to encourage staff to challenge their own discriminatory attitudes and those of others. It can also be used to encourage organisations to examine how effective and relevant the services they provide are for lesbians and gay men.

## Information

Providing relevant information is another important aspect of implementation. Information should be provided to all members of staff on lesbian and gay issues (possibly as part of training) and contacts for organisations which deal with those issues. Similar information for lesbians and gay men should also be available to service users.

## Research and staffing

Another way in which employers can be encouraged to implement their policies for lesbians and gay men is to fight for resources to be put into lesbian and gay issues. Specialist staff could be employed to research the specific needs of lesbian and gay employees and service users and the results used to help identify how best to implement the policies.

## Monitoring

Respecting confidentiality as well as an

individual's right not to be openly lesbian or gay can make the monitoring of an EOP for lesbians and gay men more difficult than for other forms of discrimination. It may not be useful or desirable to attempt head counts of lesbian and gay employees or job applicants, not least because there is no accurate national survey by which to assess whether they are 'sufficiently represented' in the organisation. If it is considered useful, any question on an application form should clearly be marked optional.

It is important, however, that employers monitor policies to:

- ▼ ensure that the points in the policy are being put into practice
- ▼ make sure the policy is up to date on contemporary issues affecting lesbians and gay men
- ▼ assess service users' demand for information on lesbian and gay issues or any lesbian and gay specific services
- ▼ analyse the extent to which links are being made with specific lesbian and gay organisations
- ▼ review the policies on a regular basis.

NALGO branches can play a vital role in ensuring that all the points in the policy are implemented, including ensuring that their lesbian and gay members receive the protection promised by the EOP. The branch should keep a record of the number of complaints or accounts of discrimination against or harassment of lesbian and gay members and how they were dealt with.

## NATIONAL AGREEMENTS

In 1976 it became NALGO policy to include 'sexual orientation' in non-discrimination clauses in all collective agreements, and successive NALGO conferences have built on this foundation. Privatisation of many of the industries that NALGO deals with means that agreements previously made at national level may now have to be renegotiated at local level.

## Health

A major breakthrough for lesbian and gay rights was achieved when the NHS agreed to amend their national equal opportunities statement to include a reference to sexual



orientation. In addition, nationally agreed guidelines which enable locally negotiated agreements on policies to deal with harassment at work specifically include 'sexual orientation'. Branches are encouraged to seek similar provisions in local equal opportunities policies. The national action pack, *Working for Equality in the NHS*, issued as part of NALGO's campaign for equal opportunities in the NHS, contains advice for branches negotiating on other issues which directly or indirectly affect lesbians and gay men.

## Local government

Despite concerted campaigning by NALGO, the National Joint Council for local authorities' administrative, professional, technical and clerical staff (NJC for APT&C Staff) has repeatedly refused to make reference to the rights of lesbians and gay men in the paragraph which covers equal opportunities in its scheme of conditions of service (the 'Purple Book' in England and Wales, the 'Blue Book' in Scotland). However, NALGO's Local Government Committee did succeed in ensuring that advice which could be used to combat discrimination against lesbian and gay workers was included in a joint advisory booklet on equal opportunities agreed in May 1988. The Scottish equivalent, *Equal Opportunities in Local Authority Employment*, November 1988, carries more weight, in that it 'recommends' rather than simply advises.

## Universities

The Universities Central Council for Non-Teaching Staffs' agreement on equal opportunities, reached in 1986, is set out in the 'Red Book' scheme of salaries and conditions of service for clerical and certain related administrative staffs. It explicitly recognises that people can be discriminated against because of their 'sexual orientation' and recommends that training for staff involved in appointment procedures should include training on 'the effects which generalised assumptions and prejudices about... sexual orientation...might have on selection decisions'. The Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, however, has recently issued guidance which makes no mention of lesbians and gay men. Although

the first draft of their document included 'sexuality', this was later removed. NALGO members are advised that the 1986 agreement should take priority over recent guidance. Branches are being encouraged to take up lesbian and gay issues with individual universities.

## Polytechnics and colleges

When polytechnics and colleges became a separate sector in 1989, staff took with them their existing terms and conditions. For APT&C staff in England and Wales this included the 'Purple Book' and the NJC's 1988 Joint Advisory Booklet with its section on sexuality. However, once the new national bargaining machinery was established the employers refused to recognise this document, arguing that all equal opportunities initiatives were for local determination. NALGO is continuing to pursue the matter at national level and branches have been advised to seek local agreements on the basis of the 1988 booklet and NALGO's own advice issued at the time. In Scotland, where no new bargaining machinery has yet been established, APT&C staff still have local government conditions, as given in the 'Blue Book' and the equal opportunities booklet mentioned above.

## Electricity

NALGO's National Electricity Committee report the development of an intensive programme of work on equal opportunities, including lesbian and gay rights, but focusing their negotiating work in the first instance on women. The issue of lesbian and gay rights was initially raised within the National Joint Consultative Council: the employers declined to extend their equal opportunities statement to include lesbian and gay men but it was clearly stated that it was not the electricity boards' intention to discriminate on grounds of sexuality. Since privatisation, individual electricity companies have been responsible for their own equal opportunities policies and procedures. Companies have started to work on equal opportunities policies and the National Electricity Committee is continuing to support the inclusion of lesbian and gay rights in policy statements and other documents.

## Transport

Since deregulation of the bus companies there has been no national policy, although most of the companies have continued to apply the previous statement on equal opportunities, which has no specific provision for lesbians and gay men. More progress has been achieved with the Passenger Transport Executives Staff (PTE). In October 1990 the PTE agreed to revise a paragraph on equal opportunities in their nationally agreed conditions of service to include sexual orientation.

## Water

Since privatisation there has been no national equal opportunities policy. All negotiations are now conducted at district level. All the companies carry a basic paragraph on equal opportunities, although at the time of writing none specifically include lesbians and gay men.

## National Rivers Authority

This authority was created following the privatisation of the water industry. The basic paragraph on equal opportunities makes no specific mention of lesbians and gay men.

## Gas

As part of its Opportunity 2000 policy, British Gas has launched an equal opportunities initiative which includes the appointment of an equal opportunities officer and the drafting of an anti-harassment procedure. Despite the company's resistance to any trade union involvement, NALGO has succeeded in securing substantial amendments to the anti-harassment procedure which includes sexuality. At the time of publication, NALGO was continuing to push for inclusion of a whole range of equality issues, including lesbian and gay rights, in the company's initiative.

## Voluntary organisations

In recent years NALGO has considerably increased its involvement with the voluntary sector, particularly local authority grant-aided organisations and housing associations. Many have comprehensive equal opportunities agreements: for example,

according to the National Federation of Housing Associations, 41% of housing associations specifically include lesbians and gay men within their EOPs.

## LOCALLY AGREED POLICIES

The following authorities specifically include lesbians and gay men or sexual orientation in their equal opportunities policies, many of which were introduced as a result of pressure from local NALGO branches. The list is as up to date as possible at the time of publication but any branches which have negotiated new policies—or had former policies revoked—are asked to send information to the Research Section at NALGO Headquarters.

## Local authorities

Avon, Barking, Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Brent, Brighton, Camden, Cardiff, Cleveland, Croydon, Cumnock and Doon Valley, Derbyshire, Dudley, Dumbarton, Dundee, Dunfermline, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Enfield, Gordon, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Islington, Kilmarnock, Kingston, Kirklees, Kyle and Carrick, Lambeth, Lancashire, Leicester, Lewisham, Liverpool, Lothian, Luton, Manchester, Newham, Northampton, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Richmond upon Thames, Rochdale, Sheffield, Southampton, South Glamorgan, Southwark, Stafford, Stirling, Strathclyde, Sutton, Tameside, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, West Lothian, Wirral, Wolverhampton, Wrekin.

## Regional health authorities

Avon, North West Thames, South East Thames and South West.

## Other

Clyde River Purification Board.

## CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

A key aspect of providing equal opportunities for lesbian and gay employees



is to ensure that terms and conditions of service apply equally to them as to heterosexual staff. To achieve this requires a comprehensive review of an employer's existing terms and conditions to alter or remove clauses which discriminate against or do not extend benefits to lesbians and gay men.

For the employer, the cost of including lesbians and gay men will be relatively small, particularly when compared with many of the other benefits that trade unions are trying to secure, but they will make a significant difference to the employees affected.

Every employer will have conditions of service specific to their organisation, so the following should serve merely as a guide to the type of issues to look at.

### Special leave

Often the issue of special leave is not addressed until time is needed away from work. If the conditions do not explicitly state that such leave will be granted to same sex partners or carers, then a decision to grant special leave may be delayed at a time when it is crucial for the employee to take time off work immediately.

Negotiators should therefore ensure that the terms used to describe various types of special leave give equal benefit to all employees. So terms such as 'husband', 'wife' and 'children' should be changed to more neutral terms such as 'partner' or 'dependants'.

Bereavement leave, compassionate leave and time off to attend funerals are examples of special leave which all employees should know in advance they are entitled to. It is important that such leave is extended to cover same sex partners and cohabitants, dependants and friends (though most employers will probably wish to agree a list of friends to be specified in advance).

### Parenthood and childcare

Terms relating to maternity should be reviewed to ensure that they do not discriminate against mothers who are unmarried, whether co-parenting with a man, a woman or parenting alone (in the sense of there being no participating co-parent). Benefits should be extended to include all those involved in fostering and adoption.

Benefits often given to fathers—including attendance at ante-natal classes and hospitals or clinics, special leave to care for children and paternity leave before and after the birth or adoption—should be extended to nominated co-carers.

On the same basis any provision for childcare made by the employer should be equally available to all parents and nominated co-carers.

Flexible working, part-time working and job sharing, all of which may be vital for those responsible for children, should be equally available for all parents and nominated co-carers.

### Disputed residence cases

Whether partners are heterosexual, lesbian or gay, the breakdown of a relationship can be traumatic. Where children are involved, the stress may be further compounded by disputes over whom the children are to live with. Courts are less likely to agree that the child lives with the mother if she is known to be a lesbian, and many lesbian mothers find themselves involved in long court cases. Leave to attend court and see solicitors can be vital for such mothers, and sometimes gay men too, and negotiators should try to ensure this is included in special leave provisions.

### Pensions

To give equal pension rights to lesbians and gay men (and unmarried heterosexual partners too), existing pension schemes may need to be revised. At the time of opting into the scheme, the employee should have the right to designate the person whom they wish to benefit from the scheme if they die. If the employer is unwilling to change the existing scheme, lesbians and gay men might need to consider opting out to a different scheme which does allow the nomination of beneficiaries.

### Other benefits

Other benefits, such as the use of company cars, should be reviewed to ensure that they apply equally to lesbian and gay as to heterosexual partners. Special events for staff and their partners, such as staff outings or parties, should specifically be open to same sex partners (or any other individual of the employee's choice).

## CHAPTER 2

# Wanted: a fair deal

NALGO members work for employers which are major providers of services to the public. The fair provision of services to all members of the community—including of course lesbians and gay men—is an important part of the union's policies. This chapter covers some, though not all, of the services where NALGO has members, mainly health, education and local government, and looks at some of the issues which currently may prevent lesbians and gay men getting a fair deal.

Some are issues into which NALGO negotiators can have a direct input, such as the extension of equal opportunities policies (EOPs) to include users as well as providers of services. Others are issues which NALGO branches and members are urged to take up, either with their employers in the course of their work or in wider campaigns to change policies which discriminate against lesbians and gay men. Even more than the preceding chapter, the suggestions here cannot be exhaustive—consultation with branch lesbian and gay groups and members may produce more.

### EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICIES

When negotiating EOPs (see Chapter 1), it is important to negotiate a policy which states that no clients, customers and other users of the organisation will be denied services because they are lesbian or gay and that homophobic abuse from clients or users will not be tolerated.

For example, Avon County Council's EOP, which states that people must not be discriminated against or harassed because of their sexual orientation, applies to all those working for the council, applying for jobs, using council services and acting on behalf of the council, such as councillors or school governors. Any of these people who believe

they are being discriminated against have the right to make a formal complaint, and anyone found to be in breach of the council's policies will have action taken against them.

The right to develop and provide local authority services to lesbians and gay men has been under considerable attack in the last few years, most notably by means of Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. Other measures, including Section 31 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (see below), have contributed to a general backlash against lesbian and gay rights. This makes it even more important to ensure that EOPs explicitly include lesbians and gay men and that there are clear policy documents for all areas of service provision.

### SECTION 28

Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) has had far-reaching effects on all aspects of local authority policy and provision relating to the issue of lesbian and gay equality. It is an exercise both in undermining local government and eroding the civil rights of lesbians and gay men. Despite its separate legal and education system, Scotland is specifically included.

Wary of prosecution under the Act, many local authorities have sought legal advice on the practical implications of s.28, some in order to ensure the development and implementation of equal opportunities policies, others to inform themselves of possible legal restraints which might justify the lack of any significant policy development and provision.

Section 28 inserts a new section into the Local Government Act 1986 banning the intentional 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities. The Association of London Authorities (ALA) commissioned two legal opinions on s.28. The first, from Michael Barnes QC, looked at definitions, prohibitions, council reports, legal challenges and grants to voluntary organisations. The



second, from Lord Gifford QC and Terry Munyard, examined education and found that there was a duty of equal treatment owed by the education authorities to pupils. This opinion states that 'to promote homosexuality involves active advocacy directed by local authorities towards individuals in order to persuade them to become homosexual, or to experiment with homosexual relationships'.

Local authorities have never actually had the power to engage in such active advocacy, nor are any likely to do so. They do of course have an obligation to carry out their duties and provide services without discriminating between individuals or groups.

## The effects of Section 28 on local authority provision

Lord Gifford's opinion distinguishes between promoting homosexuality and providing support services intended to counter discrimination against lesbians and gay men. But widespread uncertainty about the scope of s.28 has led to serious misunderstandings about what local authorities can and cannot do. Existing prejudice has been given extra force by s.28, and many local authorities have become much more cautious so as not to risk breaching it.

There are many examples of authorities backtracking or withholding their support, such as refusing grants, curtailing funding to such events as Lesbian and Gay Pride, censoring or cancelling theatre productions, preventing circulation in schools and colleges (or in one case totally withdrawing) material which includes information on lesbian and gay projects. Specific examples include:

- ▼ In October 1989 the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Education Committee decided not to fund the Notting Hill Lesbian and Gay Youth Group, previously funded by the Inner London Education Authority. The committee's chair stated that s.28 was a major factor in the council's decision; the decision was only reversed after considerable lobbying.
- ▼ East Sussex County Council banned a booklet, published by the National Youth Bureau and funded by the Home Office, alleging it to be in breach of s.28 because it listed the London Lesbian and Gay

Centre among 100 Agencies where young people could volunteer.

- ▼ In June 1989 Edinburgh District Council turned down an application by the Scottish Homosexual Action Group for a festival of Lesbian and Gay Arts and Solidarity, having been advised by a QC that the event would contravene s.28.

However, local authorities are legally bound not to discriminate in the provision of services to individuals or groups in the community. This was reinforced by a circular issued by the Department of Environment in May 1988 to provide general guidance on the provisions of s.28 which states: 'Local authorities will not be prevented by this section from offering the full range of services to homosexuals on the same basis as to all their inhabitants. So long as they are not setting out to promote homosexuality they may, for example, include in their public libraries books and periodicals about homosexuality or written by homosexuals, and fund theatre and other arts events which may include homosexual themes.'

Many local authorities have, to an extent, put this into practice. For example:

- ▼ The London Boroughs of Hackney, Islington and Camden have continued to fund North London Pride.
- ▼ Manchester City Council took independent legal advice which confirmed that no aspect of its activities to combat discrimination contravened s.28. The council's equal opportunities unit organised a programme of seminars to explain the law to key workers, involving more than 900 staff.
- ▼ Leicester and Bristol City Councils continue to fund local helplines.
- ▼ Brighton City Council explicitly stated its opposition to s.28 and confirmed that 'under no circumstances will it permit this bigoted and immoral legislation to prevent it carrying out its grant-giving and other duties towards the lesbian and gay community'.

Nevertheless, as a result of s.28, there have been profound changes to the climate in which councils view issues of equality in service provision for lesbians and gay men. We have yet to see a legal test case, but

s.28's existence has had the widespread social effect (its 'non-legal impact') of increasing discrimination. It has encouraged restrictions and omissions in terms of support and funding to the substantial number of lesbians and gay men who form part of and contribute to the community as a whole.

Those council officers still working to ensure equality of service provision for lesbians and gay men are now more likely to be placed in 'streamlined' equalities rather than specialised lesbian and gay units. They experience daily the anxiety that simply doing their work could risk providing the test case which would determine the scope of s.28 for all local authorities. Equally symptomatic of post s.28 precautions is the more careful approach given by contact officers to their work on lesbian and gay issues, which may now be dealt with in the context of civil rights.

## The voluntary sector

Section 28 is not directed at voluntary organisations, but has implications for those funded by local authorities, some of which now demand that lesbian and gay organisations receiving grants sign a declaration that they will not intentionally promote homosexuality by means of their work and activities. According to Liberty (formerly the National Council for Civil Liberties) there are two basic points to remember. First, s.28 can only relate to that part of the organisation's work funded by a local authority. So even if a voluntary group is partly funded by a local authority, any activities carried out with funds from other sources do not fall within the scope of s.28 (provided that a distinction between the use of funds from different sources is strictly maintained). Second, if a voluntary group were to 'promote homosexuality' in terms of s.28, it would not itself risk breaking the law. However, local authorities are likely to be cautious when considering funding applications from organisations they believe may place them at risk of prosecution.

## Countering the effects

In the current political climate, the importance of lesbian and gay union organising can hardly be overstated,

especially creating active links between NALGO lesbian and gay groups, informal lesbian and gay department groups and specific council contact officers. Local lesbian and gay groups must continue pushing for paper policies to become reality—or even for paper policies to exist at all—with the active support of their NALGO branches. As well as representing their own members, these groups can encourage best practice on lesbian and gay rights within all areas of local authority delivery.

Local authority training courses and seminars on s.28 have sometimes led to a greater awareness of what can be achieved for lesbians and gay men. Indeed, the huge mobilisation against this law has put issues around sexuality high on the political agenda, with lesbians and gay men now much more visible and organised as a community and within NALGO.

## EDUCATION

Schools and other education institutes under the control of local authorities are subject to s.28. Under Local Management of Schools (LMS), however, governing bodies will be responsible for what goes on in schools and they are not affected by s.28.

A Department of the Environment circular makes clear that 'Section 28 does not affect the activities of school governors, nor of teachers. It will not prevent the objective discussion of homosexuality in the classroom... Nor does s.28 prevent 'the counselling of pupils about their sexuality' (the circular makes it clear that such counselling is to be undertaken by teachers).

In addition, Lord Gifford's opinion—which does not of course carry the weight of government advice—is that teachers may discuss lesbian and gay relationships in the classroom without contravening s.28, if this is to protect the welfare of a pupil, for example if a pupil is being bullied because she or he (or her or his parents) is believed to be lesbian or gay.

In Lord Gifford's opinion, a teacher may also refer to his or her sexual orientation in the classroom within the context of a relationship with pupils based on honesty and trust. Further, homosexual themes and content in library books, Theatre-in-Education touring programmes, in-service training etc, are all acceptable, provided they do not



promote homosexuality. Equally, it is lawful for a local authority to fund lesbian and gay groups in higher education via student unions.

## Local Management of Schools

The introduction of LMS to England and Wales has crucial implications for pupils, parents, teachers and governors who are lesbian or gay. Under LMS, school governors are becoming increasingly responsible for what goes on in schools, with local authorities having an advisory, decentralised role, which does not include the extension of their own EOPs to the school. With more schools opting out of local authority control altogether, the difficulties of equal opportunities implementation are steadily increasing.

## What can be done

NALGO members should work closely with members of the teaching unions to develop policies and campaign for their adoption by education authorities. Issues to consider should include:

- ▼ Briefing seminars on the legal implications of s.28 for school governors, education department officers, senior officers, headteachers, principals, inspectors and trade union representatives, with effective dissemination of information to all workers in and users of the education service.
- ▼ It is important that lesbian and gay parents, guardians or close relatives feel confident that their children will be educated in a way which acknowledges the validity, integrity and substance of their family relationships and domestic arrangements, and which is capable of providing them with practical support and guidance.
- ▼ Within schools, it is essential that information and support are available for young people already identifying as lesbian or gay, or who are beginning to explore such a process of self-questioning. In such situations, young people can suffer isolation, intimidation, confusion and loss of self-esteem and may become troublesome, withdraw or develop learning difficulties.

- ▼ Lesbian and gay counselling services should be used as resources by staff with pastoral roles and responsibilities.
- ▼ Within the context of sex education and as a 'whole curriculum' concern, affecting subjects such as personal and social education, health studies and English, positive treatment of lesbian and gay sex, sexuality and relationships is not only relevant to lesbian and gay pupils but also important for the development of all pupils into mature, enlightened and caring citizens.
- ▼ Lesbians and gay men should be encouraged by education authorities to serve as school governors.
- ▼ Section 28 has heightened the vulnerability of some teachers in approaching the subject of homosexuality. They need the support of governors, colleagues, senior management and governors, backed up by clear statements in policy and curriculum documents, within an overall framework of local authority commitment and action.

## Youth service

Although the youth service is not specifically covered by s.28, there has been confusion and unease amongst youth workers about provision for lesbian and gay youth groups. Lesbian and gay sexuality is seldom acknowledged in work with young people, an omission which in itself conveys a negative message about homosexuality. The publicity surrounding high profile sexual abuse cases in recent years has increased fears and discouraged openness. But, as a Liverpool social services document points out, 'denying young people access to information leaves them ignorant and hence vulnerable. Young people need protection from abusive adults not sexuality.'

In Lord Gifford's opinion, 'organisations which provide social or welfare facilities for young people who are, or believe they may be, gay or lesbian, are not promoting homosexuality, so that a local authority in funding them would not be doing so either'. Lesbian and gay groups, like any youth groups, should have access to the Youth Service and its resources; many local authorities, such as Sunderland, Manchester and Lothian, have continued to fund, or even

initiate, lesbian and gay youth groups. Section 28 should not be used as the pretext to cut funding or impose other restrictions, as Lancashire County Council attempted to do (see Chapter 3).

## HOUSING

NALGO members organising to improve the quality and range of housing provision for lesbians and gay men are well aware that such efforts exist within a context of ever-increasing cuts in government funding for public housing, homelessness and pressure on council housing.

Most public housing provision is geared towards accommodation for 'families', defined as married couples with children. Lesbians and gay men, who are more likely to be single, part of childless households or part of larger households, have traditionally been regarded as low priority on council housing waiting lists.

Lesbians and gay men face particular difficulties and types of discrimination in housing:

- ▼ Many young lesbians and gay men are forced to leave the parental home on 'coming out'.
  - ▼ Frequently, joint tenancy agreements do not provide for and protect same sex couples; there is often no right to succeed to a council tenancy if one partner dies.
  - ▼ Lesbians and gay men in hostels, shared houses, bed and breakfast establishments, council and private sector housing can face frightening levels of harassment from landlords and neighbours and this can be a major factor in their becoming homeless.
- Key issues for NALGO members to be aware of, in relation to councils, housing associations and advice agencies, include:
- ▼ All housing workers should be fully trained in issues of housing provision for, and treatment of, lesbians and gay men, including issues of harassment and confidentiality.
  - ▼ The definition of 'household' should be broadened to enable lesbians and gay men to be housed or rehoused with their partners or others. Provision is necessary, too, for rehousing if a relationship breaks down.

- ▼ Tenancy agreements should include clauses making all forms of harassment a breach of the agreement. Such a policy should be widely publicised and seen to be implemented.
- ▼ Local authorities should ensure that the legislation relating to homelessness is not applied in discriminatory ways. The law states that a person is ineligible for rehousing if they are 'intentionally' homeless. Councils are, therefore, under no legal obligation to rehouse lesbians and gay men escaping from harassment; the definition of 'priority need' requires urgent review. Some councils have adopted positive policies on this issue; equal opportunities officers can take on important liaison and referral roles with housing departments.
- ▼ Long residence requirements can also be indirectly discriminatory. For example, many lesbians and gay men, especially the young, go to metropolitan areas to escape the parental home or violence and to get support from the local lesbian and gay community. A case of 'special local connection' should be made by councils, to enable lesbians and gay men in these circumstances to be eligible for re-housing within the area.
- ▼ Considerations of privacy in relation to individual lesbians and gay men (that is, private as opposed to group accommodation of 'single' people) should be deemed valid and considered sympathetically.
- ▼ Local authority housing departments could develop lesbian and gay community housing projects, with lesbians and gay men settled together within neighbourhood estate areas. This would go some way towards countering the isolation and vulnerability of lesbians and gay men in council accommodation.
- ▼ Local authorities could also help with the creation of housing associations and co-ops for lesbians and gay men.
- ▼ Local authorities should make it a condition of supporting such organisations as housing associations, housing co-ops, projects for homeless people, tenants' and residents' associations, that they have positive policies and action programmes for lesbians and gay men.



- ▼ Housing associations and co-ops should have equal opportunities policies which recognise the discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men in all its forms and aim to challenge it.
- ▼ Local authority sheltered accommodation and residential homes should have equal opportunities policies which take into account the special needs of lesbians and gay men.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

Many aspects of social policy raise important issues of recognition and equal treatment for lesbians and gay men. Lesbian and gay social services staff should not bear sole responsibility for dealing with these issues, particularly as they too have had their confidence affected by s.28. Given the client groups of social services departments—those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged, dependent, in need of special care and support—staff who are lesbian or gay may be especially affected by negative stereotypes of lesbians and gay men as molesters or abusers of the young and defenceless.

Although social work is a traditionally caring profession, this by no means guarantees that social service staff have sympathetic attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, or that departments are prepared to develop positive policies. As a priority, staff should be given information, training and guidance concerning the difficulties faced by lesbians and gay men in society, so as to develop tolerance and understanding of their special needs and a non-judgemental sensitivity towards their lifestyles.

This is essential when dealing with:

- ▼ lesbian mothers, lesbian and gay co-parents, foster parents and their children
- ▼ young people identifying as lesbian or gay
- ▼ lesbians and gay men living in residential care—the young and the elderly, and also those receiving specialist services, for example, alcohol-related residential programmes
- ▼ lesbians in disputed child residence (formerly custody) cases.

A Liverpool social services policy document for example states that 'lesbian and gay

parents or prospective carers who come into contact with the department should be confident that it will be their parenting skills which will be assessed and not their sexuality'.

The Children Act 1989 radically changes the law on children and divorce, emphasising both parents' continuing responsibility. Instead of custody and access, courts award residence and contact orders. There is no evidence as yet that discriminatory rulings against lesbian mothers will not continue to be made. Moreover, the principle of joint parental rights, even after divorce, could mean lesbian mothers facing further unwelcome and intrusive demands from fathers.

Other important considerations are:

- ▼ Social services departments should encourage and maintain close links with local lesbian and gay counselling, support and community groups and projects.
- ▼ Care facilities should take into account the special needs of lesbians and gay men, for example provision for individual privacy, or double rooms if requested; in addition comprehensive anti-harassment policies should be evident in all residential establishments, as should effective complaints' procedures.
- ▼ Lesbians and gay men with learning difficulties have the right to information about sex and sexuality so as to make informed choices about their lives and relationships. Such choices should be deemed legitimate and not symptomatic of an individual's learning difficulties. Society's negative view of homosexuality and its discrimination against lesbians and gay men should be actively challenged by all those working with people with learning difficulties.
- ▼ Many older lesbians and gay men, who may have lived together for years without the nature of their relationship ever being formally acknowledged, may need particularly sensitive treatment. For example, if one partner dies, there are special care implications for the surviving partner, particularly if a tenancy agreement is not in her or his name or if there are no rights as a sitting tenant. It is vital that social service staff are able to make accurate identifications in such

cases, so that suitable action is taken. One type of positive action would be the setting up of social groups in day care centres for older lesbians and gay men; older lesbian and gay couples could also have the option of shared accommodation in council homes.

- ▼ Training is a priority for all staff working with older people such as home helps and staff in day centres, residential establishments and nursing homes.

## Fostering and adoption

Lesbians and gay men should have an equal opportunity to be considered and accepted as foster and adoptive parents, with each case judged entirely on its merits in terms of parenting skills. A number of councils have followed the best practices of some fostering and adoption agencies, which include specifically not discriminating against lesbians and gay men wishing to adopt or foster. However, the government's 1990 draft guidance to the Children Act on fostering was clearly designed to discourage, if not actually prevent, lesbians and gay men from fostering children. After much lobbying and campaigning, with NALGO fully involved, the final version of the guidance (1991) contained positive amendments to the original wording. It includes the statements: the 'needs and concerns of gay young men and women must also be recognised and approached sympathetically' and 'gay young men and women may require very sympathetic carers to enable them to accept their sexuality and to develop their own self-esteem'.

Key points for NALGO members to address are:

- ▼ That there should be no reversal of existing fostering and adoption arrangements where children have been satisfactorily placed with lesbians and gay men.
- ▼ Guidelines should be issued to all social service staff on the recruitment, vetting and training of prospective foster and adoptive parents within a framework of equal opportunities, to ensure (a) that there is no discrimination against lesbian and gay carers and (b) that all prospective carers have positive attitudes, given that a significant number of children needing placement will be lesbian or gay.

- ▼ There should be training for all family placement officers and all those involved in making assessments, with at least one session facilitated by a lesbian mother and/or a gay father.
- ▼ There is obvious value and benefit in lesbian and gay young people being placed with lesbian and gay carers who could provide them with positive role models and a supportive environment. Young lesbians and gay men should have the choice of being placed in a lesbian or gay household.
- ▼ NALGO already works with the Albert Kennedy Trust (an organisation which specifically recruits lesbian and gay carers) on issues such as lesbian and gay parenting, the needs of young lesbians and gay men and the recruitment of lesbian and gay befrienders and carers. The Trust works closely with some local authorities in fostering placements, and NALGO members should encourage this, and if necessary campaign to defend the work of the Trust (see *Contacts*)
- ▼ It is essential to liaise regularly with the national agencies involved in fostering and adoption such as the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, National Foster Care Association, National Children's Bureau, Parents for Children, National Association for Young People in Care.

## HEALTH

The future of the national health service in the light of government policies is a cause of enormous concern across the community as a whole. Chronic underfunding, the creation of hospital trusts, the development of fundholding GPs—all these issues make equal opportunities for patients harder to implement, sustain and monitor. Equality of access and treatment within health care provision is a fundamental right of lesbians and gay men which needs to be negotiated at every level of the health service.

The medical establishment still presumes heterosexuality and the heterosexual family unit as the norm, and medical models of sexuality which are discriminatory still prevail, including the 'popular' stereotypes of lesbians and gay men as deviant, unfortunate or predatory.



It is not just the responsibility of lesbian and gay health workers to address these issues; they may feel that there is too great a professional risk in their being 'out', which can pose difficulties with support for lesbian and gay patients.

## Hospitals

These are very public places in which lesbians and gay men can feel particularly vulnerable, as patients and visitors, in addition to having to cope with difficult, sometimes painful, situations.

A key issue is the rights and treatment accorded to same sex partnerships, which at the moment are completely ignored at a formal level. Legally, the definition of 'next of kin' is confined to the married spouse or blood relations of the patient. Deeply distressing conflict can arise between the parental family of a patient and her or his partner, especially if the nature of the relationship has hitherto been kept secret.

Partners need to have access to information and facilities equal to those accorded to the nominal 'next of kin'. While the law itself is in urgent need of change, it is possible to assert these rights of 'next of kin' by means of 'an enduring power of attorney'. An ordinary power of attorney is a legal document giving someone else the power to act on your behalf, either for a specified time or for ever, to deal with a specific matter or to look after all your affairs but its power ceases if you become mentally incapable. An enduring power of attorney, however, remains in force if you are incapable and can also be used to claim those rights normally only given to 'next of kin'. More information can be obtained from Immunity (see *Contacts*).

As a priority:

- ▼ Hospital staff need training in the issues affecting lesbians and gay men and an understanding of the social context in which they live.
- ▼ Lesbian and gay organisations and groups should be represented on local health bodies and they should check that they are on the mailing lists of regional and district health authorities so that they are kept informed of local issues and initiatives.
- ▼ NALGO members should consider the

need to campaign to change the law which defines who may be 'next of kin'.

## Mental health and support services

There is still a tendency amongst health professionals to treat homosexuality as a medical problem. It is vital for them to be aware of the social intolerance and discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men, pressures which may sometimes lead to stress and depression. 'In many ways homophobia and heterosexism cause mental health problems for people who are or want to be lesbian or gay' (Liverpool social services document). Key issues are:

- ▼ Statutory and voluntary organisations offering support for stress, alcohol and drug-related problems need to show a positive welcome for lesbians and gay men and to challenge the homophobia of other service users; staff training is essential.
- ▼ Counsellors, therapists, psychiatric staff etc. need to be positively aware and to ensure that they work within terms of reference which do not contain negative value judgements about lesbian and gay sexual identities and lifestyles.
- ▼ Health workers should be aware of the expertise within the lesbian and gay community, and value it as an important source of support, especially for young lesbians and gay men, lesbian mothers and their children, older lesbians and gay men, and lesbians and gay men suffering bereavement. Councils and health authorities should recognise the usefulness of such specialised resources by the allocation of proper funding, rather than relying upon them as voluntary help.

## Donor insemination

Lesbians, like all women, have the right to decide if and when to have children. Although self-insemination and donor insemination in clinics are both used by lesbians, there is enormous prejudice and hostility against single women and lesbians wanting children, with donor insemination and infertility clinics prioritising the needs of heterosexual couples. Health professionals

should ensure that lesbians have full access to fertility investigations, referrals to fertilisation services (AID) or infertility clinics.

## HIV

While HIV is not a gay issue as such, it affects lesbians and gay men within NALGO in a number of ways. The pattern of HIV transmission in this country to date means that the majority of people with HIV at present are gay men, and therefore a significant number of gay men in NALGO will be affected, directly or indirectly by the virus. NALGO must negotiate HIV policies which guarantee the equal rights of employees affected by HIV, as outlined in Chapter 1.

Given the statistical evidence, it could be assumed that a significant proportion of money spent on HIV prevention would be directed at work with gay men, but detailed spending breakdowns of HIV prevention work, submitted to the Department of Health under the provisions of the AIDS (Control) Act of 1987, reveal that barely a fraction of spending is targeted at gay men. In 1991 the vast majority of health authorities made no mention of gay men in their returns to the Department of Health. NALGO branches should be active in campaigning to ensure that lesbians and gay men receive the services they need, and that institutionalised homophobia should not be allowed to divert funding away from those needs.

NALGO members should campaign to ensure that service providers acknowledge that the best people to design services for lesbians and gay men are lesbians and gay men. This is likely to require change on the part of employers if effective and fair services are to be developed.

Another example of the discrimination that has been legitimised by HIV is the treatment of people with HIV by insurance companies. People with HIV find it hard to get life cover, except at vastly increased premiums, and some men find, simply because they are gay, that they have to pay increased premiums (typically at least treble) because of the supposed 'risk factor' associated with being gay. NALGO is involved with companies that offer mortgages and life insurance and should be campaigning to ensure that HIV is not used as an excuse to propagate homophobia.

## RECREATION, LEISURE AND THE ARTS

Section 28 has affected a whole range of leisure activities and initiatives, especially in the area of the arts. According to Gay Sweatshop's artistic director, s.28 has created 'a climate of confusion and fear... Books have disappeared from library shelves, photographs and exhibitions have been banned and theatre companies lost their bookings'. For example, a headteacher stopped Avon Touring Theatre Company's performance of a play featuring a homosexual character, because he feared it might contravene s.28.

To counter this, organisations like the Arts Council, the Theatrical Management Association and the Library Association have made positive moves, in some cases issuing guidelines to clarify what can be done within s.28.

Key points are:

- ▼ Local authorities should continue to offer support and funding to lesbian and gay community events such as Pride.
- ▼ Grant aid should be available to sustain, or set up if no such facilities exist, local lesbian and gay centres and other venues positively identifying with the needs and interests of the lesbian and gay community.
- ▼ Performances by lesbian and gay theatre groups, plays with lesbian and gay themes or characters should be supported, as should exhibitions with lesbian and gay contributions and subjects.
- ▼ Voluntary groups funded or supported in any way by local authorities should continue to provide services for lesbians and gay men.
- ▼ 'Women only' spaces, events and activities will also encourage the participation of lesbians in leisure services. Recreation departments can offer 'women only' sessions in swimming, weight training and self-defence as well as actively encouraging the development of women's soccer, rugby and cricket clubs.

## Libraries

Libraries are a vital source of information, entertainment and research that should be



available and relevant to everyone. According to the Earl of Caithness, the minister responsible, speaking in the House of Lords in 1988, 'local authorities have a duty to provide a comprehensive library service: provided they do this, and this only is what they intend to do, there can be no question of the clause [clause 28] inhibiting them from stocking any book they think necessary for that purpose'. In the same year, a letter from Arts Minister Richard Luce to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities stated that 'if an authority stocks books of every kind in its libraries, the fact that a particular book deals with the topic of homosexuality, or is written by a homosexual, does not put the authority at risk'.

A library, therefore, is entitled to catalogue and display such books and materials, under a lesbian and gay heading if it so wishes. The availability of lesbian and gay literature may be particularly important for lesbians and gay men living in places where there are no lesbian and gay organisations, such as rural areas, and to young lesbians and gay men. Libraries throughout the country should be encouraged to stock information of interest to lesbians and gay men, such as books and periodicals, lists of organisations which provide advice and information on lesbian and gay issues and social venues which cater for them. Local authorities should also encourage libraries to make their community facilities available to all sections of the community, whatever their sexual preference.

## LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE POLICE

Section 31 (formerly Clause 25) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 has serious implications for gay men in England and Wales. The law invites courts to pass longer sentences than the offence would normally merit for a range of offences by creating exceptions to normal sentencing policy. Three categories of consensual homosexual

behaviour within this list of 'serious sex crimes' can attract severe sentences if 'there is a risk to the public of serious harm from others': soliciting 'another man in a public place' (that is, anywhere other than a private home or hotel); 'procurement for homosexual acts' (which could include introducing gay friends to one another or allowing two men to share a bedroom knowing they are both gay); 'indecenty between men' (which can include physical contact between men in public, such as kissing, hugging or caressing). The police also use the Public Order Act to prevent displays of affection between lesbians and gay men in public on the grounds that this is insulting and could lead to a breach of the peace.

It is important to stress that all these 'crimes' are consensual offences, sometimes called victimless crimes, which would not be considered criminal if they occurred between a woman and a man.

The existing anti-gay bias of the judicial system is exacerbated by s.31 which is likely to be used extensively against gay men and could encourage the escalation of police harassment and entrapment of gay men as well as the already rising level of violent attacks against both lesbians and gay men in the streets.

Important points to address are:

- ▼ Local authorities should be urged to monitor effectively police treatment of lesbians and gay men and to prioritise the issue of lesbian and gay policing, whether within local police committees or sub-committees, or through membership of Police and Community Consultative Groups (PCCGs). Members of the lesbian and gay community should be encouraged to become involved in PCCGs as community representatives.
- ▼ Local authorities should emphasise to senior police officers that lesbians and gay men need protecting from violence, harassment and abuse and not give permission for council premises, such as public toilets, to be used for the entrapment of gay men.

## CHAPTER 3

# Organising within NALGO

Organising for lesbian and gay rights within NALGO has its roots in a conference called in 1974 by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) to address the question of employment rights for lesbians and gay men. While the conference recognised that the rights of workers, whatever their sexuality, could only be defended through collective action by the trade unions, most unions had not even started to take up the issue. Lesbian and gay trade unionists were therefore called on to campaign within their individual unions.

The call was taken up by a member of Nottingham Health branch, who wrote to *Public Service* suggesting the formation of a NALGO gay group. The ensuing controversy helped publicise the new group, which built a firm base of members throughout the country, started to organise action and, while neither seeking nor being given official status within the union, won the right to use 'NALGO' in its title, NALGO Gay Group. In the event, the group soon became known by the title of its newsletter, *Nalgay*.

## CHANGING POLICIES

The issues tackled by the group ranged from defending individual members to changing NALGO's national policies. In 1976, NALGO Annual Conference resolved that all negotiators should attempt to add 'sexual orientation' to the non-discrimination clause in all collective agreements and called upon the National Executive Council (NEC) to propose the appropriate addition to the TUC's model clause on equal opportunities.

Sixteen years later and despite some determined attempts, this basic demand has still not been achieved in most of NALGO's nationally negotiated agreements (see Chapter 1). At local level, however, particularly in local government branches, this demand has encouraged action at branch level and given the membership as a whole a chance to discuss the issues. In 1977,

Lambeth NALGO won an equal opportunities agreement with their employers which included 'sexual orientation', and since then others have followed—see Chapter 1.

## Self-organisation

An important initiative towards the creation of lesbian and gay organisation in NALGO was taken by the Metropolitan District Council's Lesbian and Gay Members Group, which called a national conference for lesbians and gay men in NALGO in 1983, from which a comprehensive motion on lesbian and gay rights went to NALGO's Annual Conference in 1984.

At a second national lesbian and gay conference in Manchester in 1984, organised by a planning group set up at the 1983 conference, a national steering committee, composed of one lesbian and one gay man from each of NALGO's twelve districts, was set up. Its main role was to liaise with the NEC and its committees, as well as to promote lesbian and gay groups in each district, and discussion and activity in the union generally. It also undertook to organise future national lesbian and gay conferences, which have taken place every year since 1985.

## Positive action

Gaining support, both from the whole membership of NALGO and in terms of official recognition and support within the union, has not always been straightforward. In 1985 NALGO Annual Conference reaffirmed its acceptance of the principles of positive action to combat the discrimination experienced by women, black members, lesbian and gay members and members with disabilities. The Positive Action Working Party (PAWP) which was then set up to report on how to implement such positive action included members from the existing National Equal Opportunities Committee and co-opted two members each from the National Lesbian



and Gay Steering Committee, as well as the Black Members' Steering Group and the Disability Consultative Committee.

The original report of the PAWP was rejected by NALGO's NEC, which produced its own paper, which was in turn rejected at NALGO's Annual Conference in 1988 (by a combination of those opposed to any positive action strategy and those opposing the specific terms of the NEC report). Finally, later in 1988, the NEC recommended the formal establishment of four committees to represent the interests of women, members with disabilities, black and ethnic minority members and lesbian and gay members. The National Equal Opportunities Committee thus became the National Women's Rights Committee, its terms of reference were amended to exclude lesbian and gay issues and the National Lesbian and Gay Steering Committee became a formal, funded part of NALGO structure. It was renamed the National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee (NLGCC) in 1991.

Formal action, however, was only part of the story; open debate was needed to change attitudes. 'One of the interesting things about that period', according to Chris Eades, who became very actively involved after the 1983 lesbian and gay conference, 'was that unlike any other equal rights issue, lesbian and gay rights came under huge attack.' At NALGO's Annual Conference in 1986 the union's existing commitment to lesbian and gay rights was threatened by a composite motion which sought to 'reappraise' those policies and an amendment which referred to 'the present aggressive campaigning style on behalf of gays and lesbians'. With the backing of the NEC, the motions were fully debated and rejected by Conference. Chris Eades believes this successful defence was critical in creating 'a growing acceptance of the issue'.

## NATIONAL LESBIAN & GAY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

The terms of reference of the Committee are:

1. To work towards the elimination of discrimination against lesbians and gay men in society, in the workplace and in the union.
2. To monitor continuously the way equality of opportunity for lesbians and gay men is being pursued.

3. To ensure that the particular needs of lesbians and gay men in all issues relating to conditions of service are identified and adequately provided for.
4. To take specific action to try to eliminate the extra level of discrimination faced by black lesbian and gay members and lesbian and gay members with disabilities.
5. To maintain contact with and make recommendations to the NEC, the other Self-Organised Committees, Standing Committees of the Council, Service Conditions Committees, the National Health and Safety Committee and advisory committees and working parties set up from time to time.
6. To maintain contact with District Lesbian and Gay Committees/Groups and Branch Lesbian and Gay contacts.
7. To hold meetings and seminars in furtherance of the objects of the committee.

## Organisational structure

The Co-ordinating Committee is composed of one lesbian and one gay man elected by each district, having been nominated at district or branch lesbian and gay group meetings, with funding for four members from the Black Lesbian and Gay Caucus and two from the Disability Caucus (further funding for these caucuses is still under negotiation).

The Committee elects two Co-chairs each year, one lesbian and one gay man. It is divided into sub-committees, which meet in addition to full committee meetings. These sub-committees are currently:

- ▼ Conference, responsible for organising the National Lesbian and Gay Conference.
- ▼ International: their work has mainly been making links with lesbians and gay men in trade unions in other EC countries.
- ▼ Education organises courses specifically for lesbian and gay members and liaises with district education officers to provide relevant courses.
- ▼ New Union considers the effect the New Union will have on lesbian and gay members and how best practice can be maintained and improved.
- ▼ Legal examines all the legislation affecting lesbians and gay men, such as the

Criminal Justice Act 1991 and the Local Government Act 1988. They work closely with the Publicity sub-committee when lobbying and campaigning on the law.

- ▼ Publicity is responsible for initiating materials, such as this handbook, and *Out in NALGO*, the quarterly newsletter for all lesbians and gay men in NALGO.

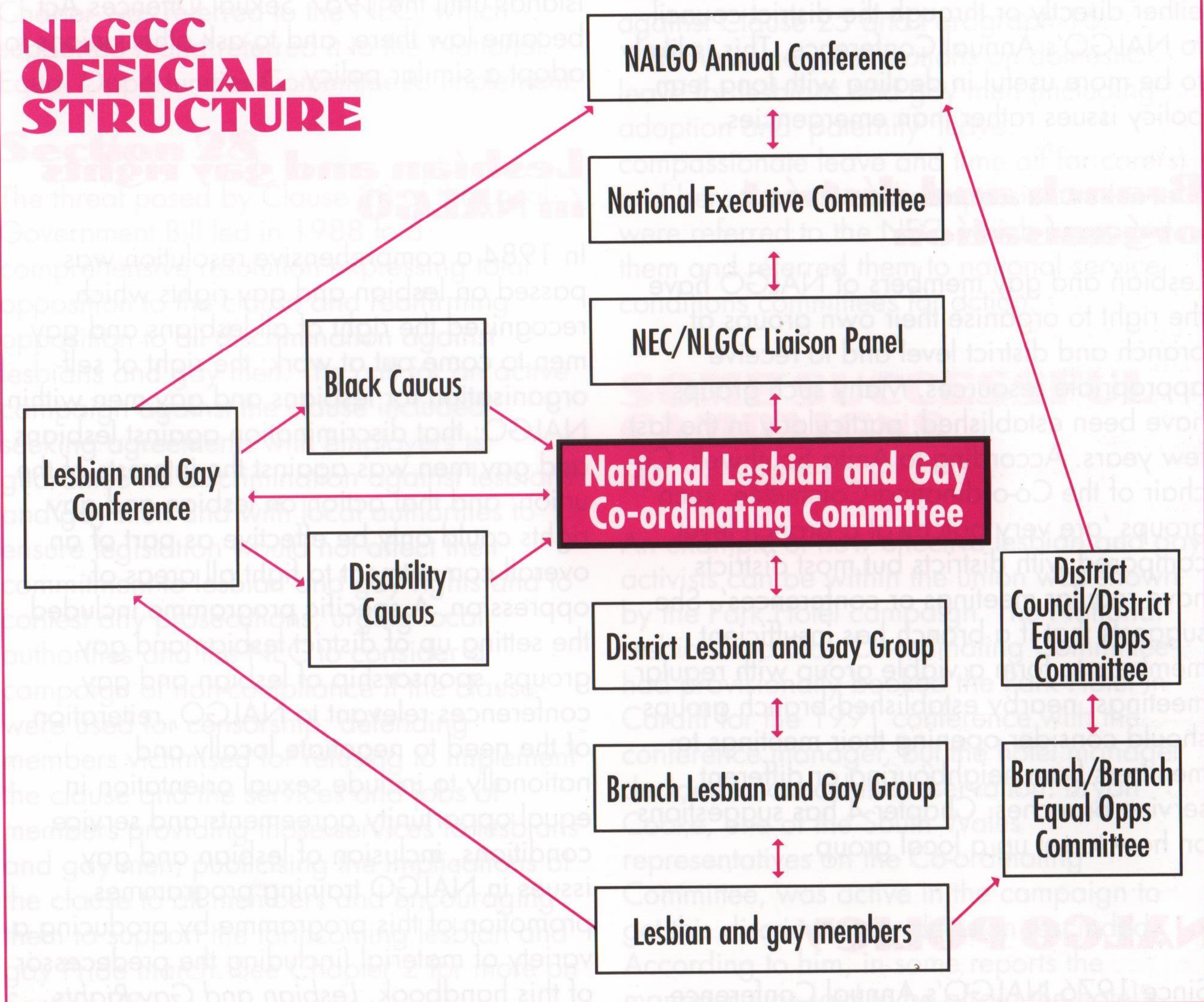
All these sub-committees report to each meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee.

The National Lesbian and Gay Conference is held annually and is open to all lesbian and gay NALGO members. It is up to branches how many delegates they fund, but half the number of the branch delegation to NALGO's Annual Conference is recommended. Anyone who has difficulty getting funding should contact their lesbian and gay district representatives. Any member who does not want to 'come out' to their branch officers should ask these district reps to approach the branch on their behalf but without disclosing their identity. The conference is largely workshop based and

includes caucus meetings for lesbians, black lesbians and gay men and lesbians and gay men with disabilities. It has the right to send two delegates to NALGO's Annual Conference. Lesbian and gay members can be put on the conference mailing list by contacting the Administration Section of NALGO's Service Conditions Department.

In terms of liaison with NALGO's other self-organised groups, the Co-ordinating Committee has two representatives on the National Women's Committee. Members of the black caucus and caucus of lesbians and gay men with disabilities on the Co-ordinating Committee are elected at the Lesbian and Gay Conference. Black caucus members report in writing to the National Black Members Co-ordinating Committee but are not mandated by it. Members of the disabilities caucus represent the Co-ordinating Committee to the National Disability Committee. In addition, the co-chairs of the four self-organised groups meet regularly to discuss policy which may affect them or join together to support each other.

## NLGCC OFFICIAL STRUCTURE





## Getting things done

There are two routes to take for an individual lesbian or gay member of NALGO who wants to affect national policy. The first is through the lesbian and gay self-organised structure. Issues can be raised in a branch lesbian and gay group, where one exists, or the district group, both of which can send motions to the annual Lesbian and Gay Conference, or the district's lesbian and gay representatives can be asked to take the issue to the next NLGCC meeting. The Co-ordinating Committee can make decisions on urgent issues but a more general policy question would be sent to Conference. Once a motion has been passed at Conference, the Committee takes action, sending the policy for implementation to other relevant NALGO committees and making sure it is implemented. Two of the resolutions passed at Lesbian and Gay Conference are chosen there to be sent to NALGO's Annual Conference where, if they are passed, they become national policy.

The second route is to use the ordinary NALGO structure by bringing issues to the branch which can then be sent as motions, either directly or through the district council to NALGO's Annual Conference. This is likely to be more useful in dealing with long term policy issues rather than emergencies.

## Branch and district organisation

Lesbian and gay members of NALGO have the right to organise their own groups at branch and district level and to receive appropriate resources. Many such groups have been established, particularly in the last few years. According to Anita Southwell, Co-chair of the Co-ordinating Committee, such groups 'are very patchy at a branch level compared with districts but most districts have regular meetings or conferences'. She suggests that if a branch has insufficient members to form a viable group with regular meetings, nearby established branch groups should consider opening their meetings to members from neighbouring or different service branches. Chapter 4 has suggestions on how to set up a local group.

## NALGO POLICY

Since 1976 NALGO's Annual Conference

(or the NEC in motions referred to it from Conference) has passed a number of resolutions affecting lesbian and gay rights. There is no space here to give more than a brief résumé, but a full text is available from the Administration Section of NALGO's Service Conditions Department.

In 1978 NALGO reaffirmed its opposition to discrimination against sexual minorities, called again on all negotiators to attempt to add 'sexual orientation' to the anti-discrimination clause in all agreements and instructed the NEC to initiate a programme of education on the rights of sexual minorities. In 1980 NALGO was able to note with pleasure that the gas service had added 'sexual orientation' to its national agreement but reiterated its instructions of 1978.

Three years later the belief that sexual orientation was a matter of choice was reaffirmed and law reform to effect this throughout the British Isles called for. Linked to that was a resolution instructing the NEC not to hold NALGO Annual Conference in an area where the policies of the local authority or parliament clashed with those of NALGO, specifically the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands until the 1967 Sexual Offences Act became law there, and to ask other unions to adopt a similar policy.

## Lesbian and gay rights in NALGO

In 1984 a comprehensive resolution was passed on lesbian and gay rights which recognised the right of all lesbians and gay men to come out at work; the right of self-organisation for lesbians and gay men within NALGO; that discrimination against lesbians and gay men was against the interests of the union; and that action on lesbian and gay rights could only be effective as part of an overall commitment to fight all areas of oppression. A specific programme included the setting up of district lesbian and gay groups, sponsorship of lesbian and gay conferences relevant to NALGO, reiteration of the need to negotiate locally and nationally to include sexual orientation in equal opportunity agreements and service conditions, inclusion of lesbian and gay issues in NALGO training programmes, promotion of this programme by producing a variety of material (including the predecessor of this handbook, *Lesbian and Gay Rights*

*Organising Pack*), and campaigning for the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

The following year, two resolutions were passed which led to the setting up of the Positive Action Working Party and called for a comprehensive programme of positive action within NALGO, including funding and organisational support for self-organisation by women members, black members, lesbian and gay members and members with disabilities.

While HIV is not a lesbian or gay issue as such, it is lesbian and gay activists who have been primarily responsible for developing NALGO's policy. In 1986, a resolution recognised HIV as an issue affecting NALGO members both as people who might be directly affected and as workers in the caring professions, noted the media's homophobic and racist portrayal of AIDS and various attacks on the employment rights and civil liberties relating to HIV. The NEC was instructed to mount a programme of action to counter these attacks in consultation with the Steering Committee.

In 1987 a comprehensive motion supporting the Lesbian Mothers' Custody Charter was referred to the NEC, which supported it and referred it to the National Equal Opportunities Committee to implement.

## Section 28

The threat posed by Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill led in 1988 to a comprehensive resolution expressing total opposition to the clause and reaffirming opposition to all discrimination against lesbians and gay men. The call for an active campaign against the clause included seeking agreements with employers to guarantee no discrimination against lesbians and gay men and with local authorities to ensure legislation would not affect their commitment to lesbian and gay rights and to contest any prosecutions; urging local authorities and the NEC to consider a campaign of non-compliance if the clause were used for censorship; defending members victimised for refusing to implement the clause and the services and jobs of members providing those services to lesbians and gay men; publicising the implications of the clause to all members and encouraging them to support the forthcoming lesbian and gay Pride march. See Chapter 2 for more on Section 28.

## Countering attacks

By 1991 there were further attacks on lesbian and gay rights to counter. Conference opposed and deplored the draft guidelines (Paragraph 16) on fostering for the Children Act 1989 (see Chapter 2) and supported the principle that fostering should be done by the most suitable foster parents without prejudicing any particular groups of people as unsuitable. Conference condemned the media smears against a prospective lesbian adopter and her partner in Newcastle and deplored the media campaign against lesbians and gay men parenting. It noted the increasing attacks on lesbians and gay men in the context of Section 28 and the threat posed by Clause 25 (now Section 31) of the Criminal Justice Bill (see Chapter 2). It resolved to condemn attempts to recriminalise homosexual sex between consenting adults; to demand the removal of such activity from Clause 25 and the amendment of Paragraph 16 and any other legislation which impinged on lesbian and gay civil liberties; to support lesbian and gay organisations campaigning against Clause 25; and to publicise the campaigns against Clause 25 and Paragraph 16.

In the same year, motions on domestic leave for lesbians and gay men (including adoption and 'paternity' leave, compassionate leave and time off for carers) and bereavement and compassionate leave were referred to the NEC, which supported them and referred them to national service conditions committees for action.

## SOME SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS

### Park Hotel

An example of how effective lesbian and gay activists can be within the union was shown by the Park Hotel campaign. The National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee had provisionally booked the Park Hotel in Cardiff for the 1991 conference with the conference manager, but the hotel manager decided to cancel the reservation. Bryan Cooke, one of the South Wales representatives on the Co-ordinating Committee, was active in the campaign to get this discriminatory decision rescinded. According to him, in some reports the manager was said to be afraid the hotel's



sheets would be 'heavily soiled, he was worried about young staff and had troubles with a women only disco'.

The ensuing campaign was an effective counter to such homophobia: at a national level, the NEC decided to boycott the Park and other hotels in the Mount Charlotte-Thistle group. At a local level, there was a six hour picket outside the Park Hotel with good media coverage. 'What was good was the support of other unions, including COHSE,' says Bryan Cooke, 'that was what helped us to win it at the end of the day.' The lesbian and gay community also boycotted the group—'I don't think the hotel had realised how powerful a pull we had—the hotel realised that the pink pound was a strong pound'.

By May the Mount Charlotte-Thistle group had changed its policy and the manager of the Park Hotel wrote to NALGO to say that the hotel would be more than happy to welcome the Co-ordinating Committee to hold its meetings there and committed itself to a policy of nondiscrimination against any member of society. An added bonus for Bryan Cooke was the support of the district: 'NALGO in Wales has always been weak on lesbian and gay issues, but I couldn't have gone on so long without the support of the district. One branch with a lesbian and gay group, Cardiff City, were very helpful and their equal ops person was brilliant. Without them the campaign would not have been as strong as it was.'

Another successful campaign was mounted when *The Voice* published several homophobic articles—see Chapter 5 for details.

## Resisting Section 28

The extent to which Section 28—or more accurately the fear of how it might be interpreted—has affected some local authorities is shown by action attempted by Lancashire County Council and Newcastle City Council; there are further examples in Chapter 2.

In Lancashire, the Skelmersdale '1 in 10' Lesbian and Youth Group ran into trouble with the County Council, which cited s.28 as the cause of its actions: photographs of an exchange visit with a German gay youth group were removed from the County Hall and material advertising activities and counselling services was withdrawn and

banned. The council then issued guidelines—including the provisions that nothing could be done without prior approval and that no advertisements should be aimed at under-16s—without consulting either the workers or the young people concerned. A campaign was organised by NALGO and the Community and Youth Workers Union, with very active involvement from NALGO's district lesbian and gay group: lobbying of councillors and an extensively reported demonstration organised by the Lancashire Lesbian and Gay Coalition in Preston at the end of 1991 led to the withdrawal of the council's guidelines in 1992 and a commitment to start from scratch with consultation with lesbian and gay workers, young people and the unions concerned.

In Newcastle a voluntary group, on behalf of the council, was producing a pack for young people consisting of a series of information leaflets on a variety of topics such as housing and welfare rights and including one on sexuality. Richard Bliss, one of two gay men from North Eastern district who job-share representation on the Co-ordinating Committee, explains what happened: 'When the pack came before the relevant committee, a legal officer pulled the section on sexuality because it included a list of lesbian and gay books, organisations and pubs. He claimed that that would be "promotion".'

The district lesbian and gay group set up a series of meetings with some of the more sympathetic councillors and made some progress with them. 'We also got a letter written by NALGO's General Secretary, Alan Jkinson, to the leader of Newcastle City Council outlining NALGO policy and in addition NALGO's Legal Department wrote an opinion saying that the leaflet didn't contravene Section 28.' The leaflet was taken back to the committee and the information remained in it as it had been originally written. The press had not picked up on the affair when it came to the committee and the pack was published without any public repercussions.

For Richard Bliss, the key to this successful campaign was the existence of an active local group which could take the issue up as it occurred. 'If there is not an active NALGO group that knows what policy is, people don't have the confidence to challenge these things.'



## CHAPTER 4

# Setting up a local group

Setting up a local group is a key part of self-organisation, whether its prime function is to provide political support, help with workplace problems, a base for raising lesbian and gay issues within the union and with the employers, or providing social contact for lesbians and gay men who may otherwise feel isolated within NALGO.

Increasing numbers of lesbian and gay activists within NALGO are involved in setting up local groups. Some groups cover a whole district, others are branch groups. Pam Haghighi was active in setting up a branch group in Devon County Council with three other people who also attended the 1990 Lesbian and Gay Conference. The first meeting was publicised to the whole branch of 5,000 members, but with certain safeguards.

'We did a piece for the branch newsletter about the conference—which we always do—but we didn't sign it. We also did a piece about the group, saying when the meeting would be and giving a phone number for the venue.' Using a phone number for details served to 'filter out' anyone whose interest was not a genuine one. The first meeting was held at Pam's workplace immediately after working hours 'because nobody would know why we were coming here'. The group has also set up a confidential link for lesbian and gay members who want to attend the national lesbian and gay conference but 'don't feel confident with the publicity'—the group liaises on their behalf with the branch to get funding for them anonymously.

Some activists have found it easier to start by setting up a district group and then move towards establishing branch groups. A large group was, for example, set up in West Midlands after the 1990 Lesbian and Gay Conference. Steve Bedser explains how they organised.

'At the Preston conference there were 15 people from the West Midlands. We went

back and fed into the district structure, and we have had a high level of support from district officers. A decision was taken by the District Organisation Officer that we would have an officer in the district office whose job description includes administrative support for us.' Since their initial meeting of 15 people in January 1991, the group has developed a mailing list of 100 people, with a solid core of 30 activists, and four or five branch groups have also been set up.

## GETTING STARTED

Reaching lesbian and gay members of the union obviously needs careful thought, not least in terms of confidentiality. There are several ways to approach publicising meetings of the group:

- ▼ personal contact, often the easiest basis on which to start the group
- ▼ publicity through district and branch mailings and newsletters
- ▼ advertising in the lesbian, gay and feminist press
- ▼ publicity through lesbian and gay organisations in the local community.

The West Midland group have advertised in the *Pink Paper*, *Gay Times* and *Spare Rib*, giving the phone numbers of two contacts, a man and a woman. In addition the district funded a direct mailshot to the 2,000 branch officers, stewards and activists on the NALGO News distribution list.

The North Eastern district group—which went from two to 40 members in 18 months—has worked hard approaching NALGO branches as well as a direct mailing on a network basis. In addition they have extensive contacts with lesbian and gay groups in the district, such as switchboards. These organisations are encouraged to refer any callers they get with employment problems to the group which tries, with the help of the district office, to solve the problem and at the same time to make contact with



lesbian and gay trade unionists who might otherwise remain isolated. The group works closely with the local lesbian and gay community, for example by helping organise Northern Pride, as well as working inside NALGO. It also has good contacts with other unions, such as NUPE, COHSE and MSF.

Where to meet can raise some issues. After their initial workplace meeting, the Devon group has moved into a local gay pub: 'it's a safe environment, quite comfortable—with free sandwiches'. In a district group, whether to meet in a central venue or to rotate the venue is another issue: the West Midland group has opted to meet regularly in Birmingham, which is easily accessible to all the current members of the group with the exception of one, who did not want to meet in his home town and keeps in touch with the group by telephone. The Devon group continues to meet in Plymouth which has the best transport connections in the county, particularly with Exeter where the next largest number of members is based.

Security can also be an important issue, particularly in parts of the country where lesbians and gay men face worse discrimination than in metropolitan areas. In Devon (where a local authority chief executive apparently stated that there are no lesbians or gay men west of Bristol!) 'we set a lot of store by safety and put a lot of effort into personal security. We have said if anybody new wants to come they should give us a ring and we will arrange for someone to meet them so that they can go to the meeting together.' People attending the meetings choose the name they want to be known by when they are introduced to the group, so that there is no pressure on anyone to 'come out' unless they feel safe doing so.

The structure of the meetings themselves may need to be flexible to accommodate the differing needs of members. In the West Midland group 'we start at 7.30 and limit the business to two hours. It's a private room in a pub with a social atmosphere—we even had a cabaret paid for by the district at our inaugural meeting. The group includes people who only turn up at 9.30 for the social. Members have different needs: political support, social support, dealing with practical workplace problems. There is a range of people: some have been out since a tender age and some are only out in the district group.'

## WORKING WITHIN YOUR BRANCH

As well as organising a NALGO lesbian and gay group, it is important to raise issues within the branch. One way, obviously, is to raise specific issues via motions at branch meetings, whether it is support for a member who is being victimised or a wider issue which affects NALGO members and the services they provide, such as campaigning against Section 28 (see Chapters 1 and 2).

While lesbian and gay rights, and the right to self-organisation, are NALGO national policy (see Chapter 3) prejudice does still exist and may be evident in branches—from personal remarks to attempts to stifle discussion altogether. It may help to raise the issues in co-operation with the branch equal opportunities officer or committee. Lesbian and gay members of the branch who are not 'out' may feel more comfortable discussing the issues in the wider context of equal opportunities; it is worth considering organising a meeting on equal opportunities which would, of course, include lesbian and gay rights.

## ORGANISING A MEETING

A number of things need to be considered when organising a meeting. Plan ahead as much as possible, as some of the things needed—such as a good venue and effective publicity—may take some time to organise.

### Finding a venue

The perfect venue—the one that suits all members and potential members—may be hard to find and compromise may be necessary. But the following points should be taken into account, in consultation with those most affected by them.

- ▼ The venue should be fully accessible to people with disabilities (see later in this chapter and Chapter 6).
- ▼ Your workplace, branch or district may be able to provide a room, but will this deter lesbian and gay members who do not wish to risk being identified?
- ▼ A room in a pub will reduce the risk of lesbians and gay men who are not 'out' being identified; some people may find it

more relaxed and congenial, but others find a pub atmosphere alienating; full access for lesbians and gay men with disabilities can be hard to find in pubs; non-smokers and non-drinkers may also have objections.

- ▼ How easily accessible is the venue in transport terms and how well-lit and populated is the surrounding area? Problems of this sort may be overcome by making arrangements for people to come and go accompanied and for lifts to be given to those without their own transport.
- ▼ If there is a charge for the room, will it be funded by the branch or district, or will the cost need to be raised by those attending?

## The structure of the meeting

The group may prefer to divide the meeting into two parts, for business and socialising. Be careful that if the meeting 'adjourns to the pub' some members are not excluded (see above). The 'business' part of the meeting could be run quite formally with a chair, which can help ensure that it does not go on too long and that everyone can participate. In a small group such formality may be unnecessary, but beware of a few people dominating—an informal 'facilitator' can help make sure that everyone, including new members, has a chance to contribute.

### Speakers

However informal the meeting, a speaker can help focus discussion on a specific issue. Such a speaker could be from within NALGO (your branch or district equal opportunities officer may have some suggestions), from the local lesbian and gay community (you should be able to get some contacts via your local switchboard—see *Contacts*) or from within the group itself.

### Videos and exhibitions

Videos and exhibitions can also provide a focus for a meeting and a starting point for discussion, but remember that blind, partially sighted and deaf members may be excluded if such things are made too important a part of the meeting—a signer for videos and someone to provide a commentary may help.

Talk to members with disabilities about how to do this best.

## Layout of the meeting

An informal layout can help make it possible for everyone to contribute. It is particularly important that the arrangement of the room should enable members with disabilities to participate fully.

## Care for dependants

It is important not to exclude lesbians and gay men who care for children or other dependants. If your meeting is held during the day at the weekend, you might consider organising a creche for members' children; NALGO has a booklet, *Organising a creche*, which gives practical advice on how to go about this. If, as is more likely, you are meeting in the evening, bear in mind the timing of the meeting: carers may need to go home first rather than coming straight from work. Find out whether any carers need help with babysitting or looking after other dependants: you could either organise a rota of group members willing to miss the occasional meeting and go to carers' homes or pay for a babysitter or other helper.

## LESBIANS AND GAY MEN WITH DISABILITIES

It is essential both to provide facilities for members with disabilities and to ensure that the agenda will be relevant to them if the meeting is to be fully accessible to all the potential members of the group. Consult with disabled members on what facilities are needed and remember that such needs change as the membership and individuals change. Discussion at district level, where it may be possible to have input from a wider range of people with disabilities, may generate more suggestions. Events should be budgeted and any extra funding needed to make them fully accessible should be obtained from the branch or the district in accordance with NALGO policy. At the time of publication, the National Disability Committee was working on revised access guidelines which will be available shortly from the Research Department at NALGO headquarters.



Recent trends show that the better the facilities the greater the involvement of people with disabilities. But able-bodied members should not assume that simply by providing facilities people with disabilities will turn up in droves: facilities should be available because they are a right and disabled people can choose whether or not to attend without feeling morally obliged to.

## Access

Basic requirements include:

- ▼ nearby car parking, preferably including allocated space for disabled people
- ▼ level access to venue
- ▼ wheelchair accessible toilets
- ▼ level access or wheelchair accessible lifts to all rooms/facilities used during event
- ▼ availability of interpreter/induction loop/brailled/translated/taped information
- ▼ refreshments for various dietary needs, including non-alcoholic drinks
- ▼ free entry for any enablers accompanying people with disabilities.

## Access guidelines

Precise information on all aspects of access is essential and the availability of access guidelines should be advertised in any publicity for the event. When preparing guidelines, remember:

- ▼ The venue should be confirmed as accessible by disabled people themselves—do not go by telephone information
- ▼ participants need to know what facilities are not available
- ▼ precise measurements, such as the width of doors, should be given
- ▼ a contact person should be included in the guidelines so that participants can explain any other needs.

The following guidelines are based on the SAD Code produced by Sisters Against Disablement (see Chapter 6). It can be used as a brief checklist when preparing specific guidelines.

- ▼ Parking: Outside entrance; less than 50 metres away; more than 50 metres away.
- ▼ Public transport: bus numbers; tube station; rail station; less than 50 metres away; more than 50 metres away; more than a quarter of a mile.
- ▼ Entrance: level; ramp with/out handrail (left or right); steps (how many) with/out handrail (left/right).
- ▼ Doors: width (measure when open); heavy/light; revolving; opening inwards/outwards.
- ▼ Inside building: (i) Ground floor level: steps with/out handrail (number of steps and position of handrail); steep steps, shallow steps, curved steps. (ii) Same information for any other floors being used.
- ▼ Lift: width of door when open; dimensions; controls flush/protruding and height from ground; doors (automatic/manual; heavy/light); braille labelling/synthesised voice
- ▼ Toilets: width of door when open (wash area/cubicle); dimensions of cubicle/turning distance for wheelchairs; doors opening inwards/outwards; rails.
- ▼ Dimensions of premises: distance from entrance to each room used.
- ▼ Floor surfaces: slippery/carpet/smooth (noting any differences).
- ▼ Lighting: bright/dim/flexible (such as movable lamps).
- ▼ Seating: hard/soft; high/low; fixed/movable; extra seating available on request.
- ▼ Heating: warm/cool/variable.
- ▼ Participation: sign language interpreters; braille; tape; large print; induction loop; finger spelling; lip speakers; note-takers/overhead projectors.
- ▼ Enablers: transport provided, meeting and escorting; general help (give name and phone number).
- ▼ Dependants (i) Creche: on premises/elsewhere (use Access Code); run by women/men; ages accepted; hours open; girls only/mixed. (ii) Childcare or care for other dependants: expenses available/not.

- ▼ Food and drink: food available/not (vegan/vegetarian/halal/kosher/diabetic); help with carrying food; drinks available/not; alcoholic/non.
- ▼ Smoking: banned/allowed; smoking room available.
- ▼ Structure of activities: formal/informal meetings; plenaries/workshops or small groups; frequency of breaks.

## Other issues

- ▼ Papers for a formal conference should be available well in advance in the appropriate format (including if necessary large print, braille, tape or on disk).
- ▼ Try to provide a quiet space for people to rest—especially important at a social event with music.
- ▼ Keep sound levels moderate and try to ensure reasonable light so that people with hearing disabilities can communicate more easily.

The following suggestions are not intended to be prescriptive but may help able-bodied members be aware of the kind of behaviour needed to carry out the spirit as well as the letter of NALGO's policy on access. The key, of course, is to respect all NALGO's members equally. If in any doubt about what is appropriate, ask disabled members.

- ▼ Remember to include someone with disabilities in a group to give her or him the maximum opportunity to participate in the discussion.
- ▼ Always address a deaf person directly, make sure you are in a good light and that you don't obstruct your mouth by your hand or a glass. Speak directly and clearly, but don't shout or over-annunciate. If you have not been understood, repeat what you have said or rephrase the sentence, but don't give up. Speak at your normal rate with a normal expression and, if communication is still hard, ask the deaf person whether she or he would like you to write down what you have said.
- ▼ Don't leave a deaf or blind person in the middle of what they are saying—this is especially frustrating for a blind person, who may not know that your attention has been directed elsewhere.

- ▼ Don't finish off the sentences of someone with a speech disability. It may mean that conversations take longer, but it also means that the disabled person can really participate. If you find it hard to understand what someone is saying, then say so and ask her or him to repeat it until you have understood. Never pretend you have understood when you have not: this is insulting and makes the disabled person feel that what he or she is saying isn't worth bothering to understand.

- ▼ If you think someone may need help with something, ask whether they do. Listen carefully to what they say and remember that they know better than you what they need. Remember that it is often embarrassing or difficult for someone with a disability to ask for help.

## Getting help

Providing access facilities for all meetings and events is NALGO policy, so there should be contacts for local services (signers, braille transcription services etc) available from the branch or district. If there are problems obtaining any of the contacts you need, the Research Department in NALGO headquarters should be able to help.

## HELP FROM NALGO BRANCHES

NALGO branches will have differing resources they can make available to lesbian and gay groups. Some may also have differing levels of commitment to lesbian and gay self-organisation, and it may be necessary to remind branch officers that such self-organisation is NALGO policy. The following is a 'shopping list' of resources it is worth asking for.

## Meeting facilities

- ▼ meeting room in branch office, if available and the group considers it to be appropriate
- ▼ funding for other meeting room outside workplace or union premises if group feels it necessary to ensure access or confidentiality
- ▼ funding for creche or other carers' expenses



- ▼ refreshments
- ▼ funding for enablers and other resources needed for disabled members.

## Publicity

- ▼ funding for advertising in lesbian and gay press
- ▼ access to desk top publishing (if the branch has it) and funding for printing material to publicise the group and its activities
- ▼ access to the branch newsletter to publicise information about lesbian and gay events to all branch members
- ▼ access to branch distribution systems.

## Administration

- ▼ access to typing, duplicating and mailing
- ▼ stationery, stamps etc. or funds to buy them.

## Participation

- ▼ funding to send delegates to district lesbian and gay meetings and conference
- ▼ direct representation on the branch executive.

## HELP FROM DISTRICTS

You could apply for all the resources listed above, and there should be a much higher expectation of your requests being met. In addition, you could ask for the District Office to include liaising with the district lesbian and gay group in the remit of one of its full-time officers, as well as having direct representation on the District Council.

## PUBLICITY

From talking to the person working at the next desk through to writing for our national publications, communication is essential to changing minds and policies. How effectively we communicate has a direct bearing on how effectively we get things done and publicity is likely to form an important part of starting and building up a local group. The

following is an outline of how to approach publicity.

## Make it available

NALGO itself produces a wide range of material—the problem may be knowing what and how to get it to those who want it. Some material is produced specifically for the National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee.

- ▼ *The Lesbian and Gay Organising Handbook* is intended both for lesbian and gay activists in NALGO and stewards and branch officers involved in negotiations which may affect such members. Check with your branch secretary that she or he has a copy for reference. Further copies can be obtained from the Publicity Department at NALGO headquarters.
- ▼ *Out in NALGO* is the quarterly bulletin for all lesbians and gay men in NALGO, established by the Co-ordinating Committee two years ago to provide a 'stylish forum for the exchange of ideas'. It carries news and campaigning features on relevant issues written by lesbians and gay men in NALGO and is edited by the Publicity sub-committee of the Co-ordinating Committee. If you are not receiving it, or know someone who would like to, contact the Administration Section of the Service Conditions Department in NALGO headquarters.
- ▼ Other material produced for the Co-ordinating Committee or of interest to lesbians and gay men in NALGO. If you are not sure what is available, ask your branch publicity officer or branch secretary, who should have the most recent copy of the headquarters Publicity Department's catalogue and can order what you need. Copies of the catalogue can be obtained direct from headquarters.

## Make it known

Whether you are advertising the meeting of your local group in a lesbian and gay magazine or writing an article for your NALGO branch newsletter, contact whoever is responsible well in advance to find out the deadline—and make sure you stick to it. Most regular monthly publications are

published at the end of the month but will need your 'copy' anything up to three weeks before that.

- ▼ Advertising events. Ask whether there is a free listings service or, if not, what the rates are for small ads. Remember to put in the date, time, venue, title of the meeting (if any), information about access (see above), the name of the group and, if possible, contact numbers so that anyone who is interested can find out more (or, if they cannot come to this event, can ask to be kept in touch with the group).
- ▼ News for NALGO. If you have been involved in an important campaign or have succeeded in improving local service conditions for lesbians and gay men, contact the editor of *Public Service* and *NALGO News*. He or she may want to get one of NALGO's reporters to report your story.
- ▼ Writing for publication. Your NALGO branch newsheet depends on branch members to write articles on matters of local NALGO interest, and research shows that the more local the news the more members are interested. Contact your branch publicity officer or newsheet editor to see whether he or she would like you to write an article on a particular topic. Find out what approach is needed, how long the piece should be, and deliver it on time! Articles on lesbian and gay issues are a vital part of self-organisation at local level.
- ▼ *Out in NALGO*. You can contact the Publicity sub-committee via the Administration Section in NALGO headquarters' Service Conditions Department. Remember to do so well in advance as it is published quarterly.

## Make it yourself

- ▼ Writing for publication. There are a few basic rules of journalism worth remembering when writing articles for publication. Start with a clear, strong first paragraph. It should answer the journalist's basic questions who? what? where? when? and why? Later paragraphs can expand on this information. If you can use direct 'quotes' from people involved, your article will be more lively.
- ▼ Producing a leaflet. You may want to produce your own leaflet for an event or as part of a campaign. Keep it as short and simple as possible, following a basic list of points. Write a short, punchy headline to attract attention. Remember to include information on who has published it. Your branch publicity officer should be able to help you find out how to get it produced.
- ▼ Posters should have few words—include the briefest information necessary. Headlines are even more important than for a leaflet. If you have any graphic or design skills it will be even more effective—again, your branch publicity officer may be able to help.

## Getting help

More help on publicity can be sought from your branch or district publicity officers. NALGO districts also run publicity courses. You will find much more information on all aspects of writing, editing and production (as well as other aspects of publicity) in the *NALGO Publicity Handbook* available from the Publicity Department at headquarters.



# Black lesbians and gay men

**M**ore likely to be discriminated against than many other groups of workers, it is important that all black members, including of course black lesbians and gay men, have the full support of the union and feel able to participate in its activities at all levels.

A major barrier to black lesbians and gay men organising within any large institution like NALGO is a general lack of understanding about the issues that are important. Fighting racism is just as important to black lesbians and gays as challenging heterosexism. This is often misunderstood by white lesbians and gay men, who seem to think that black lesbians and gay men have a choice about which oppression they can prioritise.

When black lesbians and gay men do raise the issue of racism, the attitude of white lesbians and gay men is often one of irritation, almost as if white lesbians and gay men think that black lesbians and gay men are being deliberately obstructive by raising such issues. Many black lesbians and gay men get frustrated about the amount of explaining they have to do, and the demoralisation and isolation that comes from continually having to challenge discrimination. Not surprisingly, many become disillusioned after their initial involvement and take no active part in trade union business.

This chapter of the handbook gives a brief history of black lesbian and gay organisation in this country, looks at the major issues that affect black lesbians and gay men, and suggests some practical measures that branches can take to make NALGO more accessible to black lesbians and gay men. Throughout this section a broad political definition of the word 'black' has been used to include those who are descended from Asians, Africans, the original inhabitants of Australasia and the Americas, and any people from non-white nations, including European countries, who describe themselves

as black because of their experience of being discriminated against on grounds of colour, race, ethnic origin or nationality.

## BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY ORGANISATION IN BRITAIN

History is primarily written by groups with power. Because of this there has been little written about the history of black people in this country—or, of course, about black lesbians and gay men, who have not had the resources to produce information about how discrimination affects them. The small number of published works by black lesbians and gay men have all too often not been widely available.

### The first groups

The first documented political group was the Black Lesbian Group, formed after the uproar caused at the 1980 conference of the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) by the suggestion that there should be a workshop for lesbians. The group's meetings were lively and well attended, and by the following year OWAAD had accepted that black lesbians had a right to hold their own workshop.

Around 1981 the Gay Black Group was formed, and met at Gay's The Word bookshop in London. In the anthology *Walking After Midnight*, Zahid Dar describes its growth and the discussions that led to the political definition of the word 'black': 'From '81, the Gay Black Group just went from strength to strength. We had lots of consciousness-raising sessions and lots of heated debates about various things. A recurrent one was the cultural differences between Afro-Caribbeans and Asians and the fact that we called the group 'Black'. We would get Afro-Caribbeans coming to the group, saying 'You can't call yourself Black—Black means Afro-Caribbean'; and

Malaysians saying 'I'm brown not black'. But the political argument for calling the group 'Black' was that it wasn't the colour of your skin that mattered—it was the experience of imperialism and racism...'

For these reasons many black lesbian and gay groups have used a broad political definition of the word black. This has many advantages, particularly considering that lesbians and gay men are already a minority. However, vast cultural differences do exist within black communities, and cannot be ignored and many groups have formed along cultural lines.

For example, the Chinese Lesbian Group was formed in 1983. In *Radical Records*, Yik Hui describes her feelings about the group: 'We also discovered the richness and variety of our backgrounds and a growing understanding of our shared roots. All of us are living in a diaspora twice removed—that is, our ancestors were already immigrants when we were born, and we, or our families, have repeated it again, going this time to our past colonial masters. Between us, our ancestors have travelled through three continents for us to arrive here. This group is my family in this country now, it is my anchor in an insecure world and it has expanded and grown in confidence.'

### Building on success

Since the start of the early groups black lesbians have organised two conferences, Zami I, in 1984, and Zami II, in 1989. The very name Zami conveys just how important the combination of being black and lesbian is; the word comes from the Caribbean island of Grenada and describes women loving women. These events were important in bringing together hundreds of black lesbians, and showed that it is now possible to organise on a political and cultural level without the constraints of racism, sexism or homophobia.

1985 saw the start of the first publicly funded black lesbian and gay group. The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre Project (see *Contacts*) has been a consistent voice for black lesbian and gays in this country, fighting racism in the lesbian and gay community as well as challenging homophobia in the black community. The existence of a funded group has also made it easier for black lesbians and gay men to

setup other groups, using the BLGC newsletter to make contact, and 1987 saw the first conference for black gay men.

In 1988 Shakti, a group for South Asian lesbians and gay men, was established which produces a bi-monthly newsletter, has instigated regular socials with bhangra music, and is setting-up a housing co-operative.

Black lesbians and gay men have also been organising internationally for some time. London hosted the Sixth International Lesbian and Gay People of Colour Conference in 1990, with participants from all over the world. Black lesbians and gay men from this country have also travelled to international conferences in the Americas and Asia.

Currently there are several groups for black lesbians and gay men (see *Contacts*). 1991 saw the beginning of the first British based newsletter, *Zaminews*, exclusively for black lesbians, and of the ALOA (Asian Lesbians Outside of Asia) newsletter. There is also a regular black women's club, 'Sauda', meeting in London, where the very distinctive developments in black lesbian arts are expressed.

Black lesbians and gay men are frequently excluded from participating fully at events which are intended to include them. Often the excuse has been: 'We couldn't find any'. But as this section shows, although black lesbians and gay men are under resourced as a group, they have been organising politically for some time.

## ISSUES AFFECTING BLACK LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

### Housing

Many black people in this country live in poor housing, sometimes with extended families sharing one house. The resulting lack of privacy can be intolerable for black lesbians and gay men, particularly young people who may have to leave their parental home once their sexuality becomes known. Racism makes them particularly vulnerable if they are forced to sleep rough or use night shelters.

Housing co-operatives have gone some way to housing lesbians and gay men. But



the skills needed to set up and run a co-op are those associated with white, middle-class people, involving liaison with statutory bodies like local authorities and the Housing Corporation. So many co-ops have stayed white domains and not housed black lesbians and gay men.

Housing associations have generally been effective in housing single people, but their resources are limited. Many have equal opportunities policies, but many have not done enough to make these policies accessible to clients, who may not always be convinced of the integrity of these statements; for example, if an association has a good record of housing black people, will they treat black lesbians or gay men, or black disabled people, in the same sympathetic way?

NALGO members working in housing should encourage the adoption of effective equal opportunity policies and practices by local authorities and the development of housing co-operatives and housing associations to ensure that the housing needs of black lesbians and gay men are met. Some of these housing providers already have policies against racial harassment by other tenants. Branches should encourage other providers to adopt similar policies, and extend them to include homophobic harassment.

## Employment

Fifteen years after the Race Relations Act became law, unemployment is much higher among black people than in the community as a whole. Racism keeps black people unemployed, or underpaid and undervalued in the worst jobs.

Privatisation and contracting out has cost many jobs traditionally done by women and black people; many have had to accept re-employment on lower wages and poorer conditions. Campaigns against privatisation should take into account the effect it has on black lesbians and gay men.

Black lesbians and gay men experience both racism and heterosexism at work and, in the case of black lesbians, sexism as well. This multiple discrimination can have drastic effects on their lives; they may have to change jobs frequently, be unemployed for long periods, or find it difficult to have their true potential recognised at work.

## Education

The education system in this country is based on cultural assumptions which affect all black people, both children and adults; many are failed by the system and few realise their full potential. Lesbians and gay men have a difficult passage through the education system too, and the combination of racism and homophobia can badly affect black lesbians and gay men.

Cuts have restricted black people's access to education and made it difficult for courses relevant to black lesbians and gay men—for example, on black history, women's studies and lesbian and gay studies—to be run. Training for support staff is also bound to suffer.

Black lesbians and gay men may not receive much support from college or university-based lesbian and gay groups dominated by white lesbians and gay men who often do not understand the issues affecting black lesbians and gay men; the same often applies to college counsellors and advisers.

## The legal system

Black people are more likely to be stopped by the police, less likely to get bail and more likely to be found guilty. The racism of the courts is shown up by the large numbers of black people in jail: '...black men represent 15.7% of the male prison population, whilst black women represent 25.8% of the female prison population. Black people make up only 4.4% of the population as a whole. The Prison Reform Trust have calculated recently that black people are eight times more likely to be imprisoned than their white counterparts.' (Society of Black Lawyers). In London black people are 38% of all remand prisoners, and a third of those appearing in magistrates' courts.

Gay men as a group are more likely to come into contact with the police, and black gay men become particularly easy targets in a criminal justice system where racism and heterosexism are the norm rather than the exception.

One of the ways that lesbians are discriminated against by the legal system is in disputed child residence (formerly custody) cases. Lesbian mothers are under threat of losing their children if the father brings their sexuality to the attention of the court. Black

lesbians who are fighting such cases have the additional burden of the racism of the courts. Black and working class lesbian mothers are more likely to come into contact with social services staff, who should be on their guard against racist and heterosexist attitudes when assessing whether lesbian mothers are 'fit' mothers (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

## The media

Black people are often depicted in a series of stereotypes, depending on their sex and racial origins. Black lesbians and gay men are virtually ignored by the media, especially in the more popular forms of media such as television and film. Most of what is heard or seen takes the form of flippant references to gay men; lesbians are hardly mentioned.

Black gay men have been portrayed on television, but inevitably as the common stereotype of a limp-wristed 'camp' gay man. The audience is encouraged to laugh at them rather than empathise with them. Black lesbians are remarkable for their lack of visibility. Recent documentaries have provided slightly better representation of black lesbians and gay men. For example, the Channel 4 series *Out* has included black lesbians and gay men—but there continue to be few images of black lesbians and gay men with disabilities or older black lesbians and gay men.

## Health

The health service in this country is propped up by black people—but it does not give them an adequate service. Poverty and bad housing mean they suffer disproportionately from conditions which could be easily prevented. There has also been insufficient research into such conditions as sickle cell anaemia, which mainly affects Afro-Caribbeans and people from the Mediterranean, fibroids, which disproportionately affect black women, or vitiligo, a condition which causes black people to lose pigmentation from their skin.

A disproportionately high number of black people are also treated for mental health problems, because of cultural assumptions common in psychiatry which work against black people. Once in psychiatric care, there is pressure on black lesbians and gay men to

pretend to be heterosexual so they can return to 'normal' life.

The increase of HIV has brought the issues of race and sexuality to the attention of community groups and health professionals. Here, too, the services given to black gay men are often inadequate; issues such as confidentiality can be especially important, and all too often counselling and befriending agencies have not considered the full implications for their work.

The health service is also bad at providing translators and interpreters, who are often drawn from the same community as the patient, making confidentiality an issue. There are occasions when black lesbians and gay men will need to talk to a doctor about their sexual practice. If an interpreter breaks confidentiality this could have disastrous consequences.

## Immigration and 1992

Black people from the Commonwealth used to have the same rights to live and work in the UK as white people born here but a series of immigration acts have made it almost impossible for black people to come to this country. Some immigration laws have been applied retrospectively so many black people already here find themselves losing their rights—and 1992 will make the situation much worse.

A depressing but realistic projection for the future of black people in this country is that they will be reduced to carrying papers to prove their right to live and work here, a situation not unlike the pass laws in South Africa, because, while the situation for black people who are EC citizens will theoretically improve, those who are not EC citizens will have racist immigration controls hanging over them.

Black lesbians and gay men who are not British citizens have difficulty participating in lesbian and gay events, such as marches and demonstrations, because of the fear of being arrested on a minor charge which may have more serious repercussions when looked at by the immigration authorities. Police harassment of gay men is a particular problem for those who are not British citizens.

Immigration for lesbians and gay men is also an important issue. In many countries the death penalty exists for homosexuality,



and, while this argument could be used to give lesbians and gay men refugee status, immigration rules are generally not applied in this way. Australia and Holland have enabled same sex partners to stay, rather than separating them, and the UK should extend similar rights to lesbians and gay men who want to join their partners.

The lesbian and gay community have largely ignored the issue of immigration, but there have been a few exceptions. One of these was lesbian and gay support for the Viraj Mendis campaign. The Home Office wanted to deport Mendis, a NALGO member, to Sri Lanka, despite the fact that he would face persecution there because of his political beliefs and perceived sexuality. Despite a long and hard campaign, he was eventually sent back. He is now believed to be in Germany, where he obtained asylum; given the unification of asylum procedures in Europe, such an option would be unlikely in the future.

The Lesbian and Gay Immigration group (which no longer exists) gave support and advice to lesbians and gay men who were being persecuted by the Home Office. The International sub-committee of NALGO's National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee is taking up immigration issues for black lesbians and gay men within the union, and the National Black Members Co-ordinating Committee is campaigning against the new EC immigration policies as well as existing British immigration and nationality policies.

## HOMOPHOBIA IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

The common belief that black people are more homophobic than white people is also a racist myth, based on the belief that black people are less intelligent and therefore more likely to have ignorant prejudices.

Nevertheless, homophobia is as prevalent in black communities as it is in all communities. Heterosexism, the belief that heterosexuality and the heterosexual family unit is 'normal' and, therefore, superior, prevails in all societies dominated by male supremacy. But there are other reasons for the difficulty many black people have accepting lesbians and gay men.

Religion is very important to many members of black communities, and while the teachings of most of the major religions take a fairly neutral stance on same-sex love, they have been interpreted by patriarchal societies to be homophobic.

There is a belief that 'homosexuality is a white disease', partly based on the fact that most of the lesbians and gay men shown in the media are white. More positive images of black lesbians and gay men would help, but this problem is not an easy one to solve, particularly as many black people think that black lesbians and gay men have been corrupted by white lesbians and gays. Underpinning that is the assumption that black lesbians and gay men spend their time with white people and so have left their 'roots' behind. The push by black lesbians and gay men to develop their culture and uncover their history should help dispel this assumption.

Another popular misconception is that no black lesbians and gay men exist outside western culture. There are several reasons for this belief. Because lesbians and gay men are a minority, most historical references to homosexuality have been covered up, and the way homosexuality is expressed often varies from culture to culture.

## The Voice

Together, these factors make it relatively easy to find homophobia in black communities. *The Voice*, which bills itself as 'Britain's best black newspaper', published a series of homophobic articles, attacking and ridiculing black lesbians and gay men. Shortly before the International Lesbian and Gay People of Colour Conference in 1990, it published an article about the football player Justin Fashanu, which exaggerated the anti-gay opinions of his brother John. In the same edition it was implied that gay men are responsible for homophobic attacks and have only themselves to blame.

*The Voice* has a large appointments section and has achieved the reputation of being the publication that attracts black job applicants. For this reason, advertising (particularly from 'equal opportunities' employers such as local authorities and voluntary organisations) is an important part of its income. It was therefore clearly unacceptable for *The Voice* to operate

double standards by attacking black lesbians and gay men.

A boycott campaign, organised by Black Lesbians and Gays Against Media Homophobia, against the paper's stance successfully took up the issues among black workers' groups and trade unions. NALGO played an important part by urging its members to support the campaign, following a resolution proposed by the black lesbian and gay caucus at the union's 1990 Lesbian and Gay Conference.

Articles such as 'Why these black men are glad to be gay' and a more balanced interview with Justin Fashanu have appeared, following a meeting between directors of *The Voice*, members of the campaign and representatives of NALGO. It was agreed that the paper would provide space for a one-page 'right of reply' for black lesbians and gay men, publish articles in the future which would improve representation of lesbian and gay issues, and implement a comprehensive equal opportunity policy before September 1991 to protect its own staff, including those who are lesbian or gay. With these understandings the boycott was lifted in September 1991.

## Haringey Black Action

But it is wrong to assume that black communities will not support lesbian and gay rights. Haringey Council was one of the first local authorities to take positive action on lesbian and gay rights. In 1985 they appointed five officers with specialist roles to research, develop and implement equality policies for lesbians and gay men. When a memo which stressed the need for 'positive images' of lesbians and gay men in educational materials became the focus for attacks from the right-wing Parents' Rights Group, supported by some black parents, Haringey Black Action (HBA) was formed to defend black lesbians and gays. A group of black people, including heterosexuals as well as lesbians and gay men, its aim was to challenge individuals in the black community who were using the issue of homosexuality to create division and ignorance among black people. Their role was important in enabling a united front to be formed and the links between oppression on grounds of race and sexuality made.

## RACISM IN THE LESBIAN AND GAY COMMUNITY

In this country at least, black lesbians and gay men will always be in the minority in the lesbian and gay community, and have all too often been marginalised or ignored. This is apparent in both the political and cultural activities of the lesbian and gay community.

One example of this is the racist door policy of some clubs which some white gay groups have refused to take up as an issue. Writing in *Walking after Midnight*, Zahid Dar recalls an incident in the Bell pub in King's Cross during 1983: 'On Friday night there used to be a disco run jointly by the Icebreakers collective and the Nightworkers DJs. The Lesbian and Gay Black Group, as it had become, used to go after the Friday evening meetings. Over a period of a few weeks, there was a marked rise in the attendance of skinheads wearing Union Jack T-shirts and British bulldog tattoos and some fascist regalia. The disco organisers were asked to refuse entry to these people as they offended most members of the LGBG. We were met with rhetoric about one's dress, which had nothing to do with politics. The Lesbian and Gay Black Group continued to attend—as did the skinheads. Then on one occasion I overheard one of the skinheads saying, "I don't like coloureds". I insisted he leave, but the incident went unchallenged by the organisers. The plugs had to be pulled to get Nightworkers to make an announcement. This incident sparked off a series of letters in *Capital Gay*. The core of the debate was that Icebreakers could not impose a ban on "members of the gay community" because of their dress, whereas the LGBG—myself, in particular—felt the ban was against gay racists and fascists.'

The argument about people wearing racist or fascist regalia in clubs is still very much alive. Since its opening in 1985, the London Lesbian and Gay Centre has used the same argument about being for all lesbians and gay men, although most black lesbians and gay men cannot share the same space as racists or fascists. The LLGC was boycotted for a number of years, but resisted all attempts to change its policy. Since the Centre has changed into a more commercial venture, it is unlikely that it will change its policy. The LLGC is important in that it is



often the first point of contact with the lesbian and gay community for isolated black lesbians and gay men, especially from outside London.

Apart from refusing to bar racists, some clubs on the scene operate another kind of racist door policy. In 1986, Xanadu, in Islington, was picketed by a group of mainly black lesbians because the organisers of a disco for lesbians held at the club would only admit black lesbians if they were accompanied by a white woman. The picket was successful in that the club's management took the organisation of the lesbian night away from the people running it, but the majority of white lesbians crossed the picket line.

Incidents like these have meant that the commercial lesbian and gay scene is often closed to black lesbians and gay men. But racism is often more subtle; a common experience that black lesbians and gay men have is that they are ignored, or simply treated as sex objects. To some white people a dark skin is a fetish, because of racist stereotypes about black people's sexuality.

## ACTION IN NALGO

Trade unions have been slow to take up the issues of racism and lesbian and gay rights, and have much work to do in terms of providing adequate representation for black lesbians and gay men, who experience both racism and heterosexism as well as, in the case of black lesbians, sexism. All NALGO members need to understand how isolated a black lesbian or gay man may feel who is being oppressed in a number of different ways and has nowhere to turn.

We need to examine NALGO's policies and structures so that black lesbians and gay men can express their needs through the union and be confident that the special issues that concern them are fought for when NALGO negotiates with employers.

That means fighting for adequate training so that NALGO members—such as housing staff, health workers, counsellors and student welfare officers, social workers—who deal with black lesbians and gay men as clients can understand their needs and offer a full and sympathetic service. It means making sure that recruitment and advertising policies are designed so that they do not discriminate against black lesbians and gay men, by

outlawing practices such as internal-only advertising and questionnaires that ask discriminatory questions. And it means campaigning for effective equal opportunities policies, for fair immigration laws, and for positive images in the media; and against deportations, racist attacks and cuts in spending on essential services.

## Practical measures

As far as NALGO itself is concerned, branches can take practical measures to make the union more accessible to black lesbians and gay men. For example, it is important that materials produced by NALGO at all levels are available where appropriate in languages other than English (including in non-visual forms such as tape, disk or braille), and that the standard of translation is good, because language describing sexuality can be very sensitive. For example, in some languages the only words for lesbian or gay are derogatory: for this reason the translation services used should take advice from lesbians and gay men whose first language is the one they are translating into.

Careful consideration is needed to ensure that black lesbians and gay men, many of whom prefer not to be 'out' at branch level, are not deterred from attending branch events, and that sympathetic arrangements are made that allow them to take part in NALGO-organised events (for example, NALGO's annual Lesbian and Gay Conference, which is open to all lesbian and gay members), while at the same time maintaining their 'anonymity' within the branch.

Above all, branches should aid self-organisation for black lesbians and gay men, by allocating resources (of the sort outlined in Chapter 4), supporting meetings and activities organised by black lesbians and gay men, and ensuring that race and sexuality are constantly on the branch's negotiating agenda. In the workplace black unity is often represented by black workers' groups which are important for black people in combatting the racism they experience at work. The working life of any black person is frequently marred by racism from clients, co-workers and managers which is why black workers' groups are just as important to black lesbians and gays as they are for their

heterosexual counterparts. Black lesbians and gay men will often feel reticent about 'coming out' to their fellow black workers for fear of losing valuable support offered by both formal and informal black workers' groups.

Black lesbians and gay men should not feel that it is always their responsibility to raise race issues. When they do bring up racism they should be listened to and treated with sensitivity and respect. Sometimes small details such as these govern whether black lesbians and gay men feel welcome to organise and participate in NALGO.

## Black lesbian and gay caucus

The caucus has its roots in a decision taken at the 1986 Lesbian and Gay Conference to liaise with the National Black Workers' Co-ordinating Committee and groups outside NALGO in order to co-opt black lesbians and gay men onto the Steering Committee. The following year a caucus of black lesbians and gay men met for the first time at the Lesbian and Gay Conference and a gay member of the National Black Workers' Co-ordinating Committee was co-opted onto the

Steering Committee. The Black Caucus has played an increasingly active role in the work of the NLGCC: a number of motions originating from it have been passed by Lesbian and Gay Conference, including the launch of the campaign against homophobia in *The Voice*; 'Tackling racism' workshops are a standing item on the conference agenda; and the theme of the 1991 Lesbian and Gay Conference was 'Racism and 1992'.

There are six co-optees from the Black Caucus on the NLGCC, but currently only four are funded by NALGO. Like members of the Disability Caucus, they meet separately at the start of each Co-ordinating Committee to discuss their input. The main forum for black lesbian and gay NALGO members to meet is the annual Lesbian and Gay Conference: it is important for as many as possible to attend. In common with the Disability Caucus, this meeting is able to send motions direct to the conference.

Black lesbians and gay men have a history of organisation and achievement in NALGO. 'As you can imagine,' Ted Brown, one of the current Black Caucus representatives, says, 'dealing with racism, homophobia and sexism is complex and we're still struggling with the issues. But in the long term we'll win.'



# Lesbians and gay men with disabilities

**T**his chapter looks first at some general issues relating to people with disabilities and then at issues specifically relevant to lesbians and gay men with disabilities in NALGO.

## WHAT IS DISABILITY?

Who defines disability is central to the oppression and liberation of people with disabilities. Rights, access to resources, personal relationships and status are all affected by these definitions. NALGO members' views reflect the views of society as a whole, so in their jobs in health, education and social services they may use definitions which oppress people with disabilities.

## Definitions of disability

The British Council of Disabled People defines disability as 'the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities—physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression.'

This view of disability is in strong contrast to some medical, scientific (or pseudo-scientific) definitions of disability which place the cause of disability with the individual not with society. It is also reflected in the current debate amongst disabled people as to whether they should call themselves 'people with disabilities' (that is people of whom one attribute is an impairment) or 'disabled people' (people who are disabled by society and its attitude to impairment). We use both terms here.

Impairment is when a part or system of the body is not there or does not function fully. Disability is a matter for the individual to

define, generally based on one of the following:

- ▼ physical or sensory impairment
- ▼ learning difficulties
- ▼ mental health
- ▼ long-term illness
- ▼ HIV or AIDS.

Like disability, sexuality is also a matter of self-definition: if someone with a disability says they are lesbian or gay, then they are.

## Numbers of disabled people

The number of people with disabilities is known to be greatly underestimated. Statistics are often taken from such sources as the Register of Disabled People in or seeking work under the 1944 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, on which there are about half a million people. But at the London Borough of Hackney, for instance, two and a half times as many staff assessed themselves as having a disability as were on the register. Some people may not register because registration may expose them to further discrimination. Others may not register, although they would be entitled to, because they feel this might give them an unfair advantage over people with disabilities greater than their own.

Another approach to estimating the numbers of disabled people has been to consider 'functional impairment', on which basis the government has estimated that there are 1.8m people of working age with a disability. Functional impairment defines people by the impairment they have (such as sight or hearing) and usually only those with the most severe impairment are included. Functional assessments, such as 'do you have difficulty climbing stairs?', may be used which do not take into account either the environment—it is the stairs which are the problem not the individual—or

discrimination, such as unwillingness to change the environment or attitudes.

A more accurate estimate comes from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which calculates that there are about 300,000 blind people (many more than are registered), 2.5m deaf people, six million people with mental health problems and six million people with arthritis or rheumatism.

## HOW OPPRESSION OPERATES

The oppression of lesbians and gay men with disabilities comes from many sources and operates on different levels, including the social and cultural, institutional and individual. If able-bodied NALGO members are to take practical measures to involve lesbians and gay men with disabilities, it is important to understand how the oppression operates.

Race, sex, class, age, disability and whether someone is lesbian or gay all interact to multiply discrimination and disadvantage. The discrimination experienced by lesbians and gay men who are disabled is not just the sum of the individual elements, so calling it double discrimination misses the point. The compounding of oppression can take many forms: for example, lesbians or gay men with disabilities may want to be anonymous but also need a taxi, Dial-a-Ride lift, relative or friend to take them to a lesbian or gay event.

## Social and cultural oppression

The economic and social system both produces and reinforces the oppression which institutions and individuals reflect. Economic systems have developed which rely on conformity and uniformity in the workforce and of consumers. This is reflected in the emphasis many ideologies put on the family and reproduction, and curing or eliminating disability. This marginalises and discriminates against lesbians and gay men and people with disabilities.

## Institutional oppression

People with disabilities from birth or childhood are often given segregated

education; both expectations and achievements may be lower, with choices restricted by the curriculum and facilities in Special Schools and Training Centres as well as limited access to mainstream schools and colleges. There are likely to be few positive role models for people with disabilities and fewer still for disabled lesbians and gay men.

Employment practice is rife with discrimination, both direct and indirect, against people with disabilities, from job selection to grievance and disciplinary procedures. This discrimination—and what NALGO can do to help end it—is discussed further below.

The way trade unions work may itself reinforce oppression of lesbians and gay men with disabilities. How trade unions exclude and oppress lesbians and gay men with disabilities is discussed in detail below, with suggestions for how things can be improved.

## The individual level

Individual heterosexual and able-bodied people have power over lesbians and gay men with disabilities. This power can take several forms:

- ▼ Not accepting the disabled person's right to choice and control.
- ▼ The use of stereotypes can reinforce oppression in an insidious way, such as portraying lesbians and gay men with disabilities as victims who are powerless, dependent or passive. This can include the 'personal tragedy' theory of some terrible event which caused the disability and the sexuality, as well as the belief that the individual should then accept whatever society doles out to them. Lesbians and gay men with disabilities organising, for example to make lesbian and gay venues accessible, are successfully challenging this image.
- ▼ Reinforcing internalised oppression. The use of such stereotypes can also help someone with disabilities start to believe the negative images of themselves, including the view that they can't do things which they are able to do or that they have no rights. Internalised oppression is fundamental to the difficulties trade unions find in organising, whether it is in relation to class, race, gender, sexuality or



disability, and trade unionists must recognise it to be effective.

Internalised oppression can lead to low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and an unwillingness or inability to acknowledge sexuality, disability or justified anger.

## LESBIANS AND GAY MEN WITH DISABILITIES AND NALGO

There are many ways in which the compounded effects of oppression on lesbians and gay men with disabilities may express themselves in relation to NALGO. There are powerful reasons why they may not be members, particularly if they have absorbed the negative messages referred to above.

### Activity

Lesbians and gay men with disabilities who are in NALGO may not be able, or wish, to be active on disability or lesbian and gay issues. For some members, being active may involve a level of commitment which demands more time or energy than the member can contribute. Involvement may be a simple matter of priorities, but it could also be that such members do not identify with other people who are lesbian or gay or have a disability. The structure of forums in which issues can be raised may force choices between either raising disability issues or issues affecting lesbians and gay men.

### Problems working from within

Lesbians and gay men with disabilities may not feel able to work in the union's structures—or with the people who run them—and feel there may be little gain for a lot of time and effort. They may also fear that if they do so some able-bodied members may learn a new language but fail to change their actual behaviour or that issues may be raised in a way which puts a spotlight on individual lesbians and gay men with disabilities. An able-bodied activist, with their consciousness freshly 'raised', may, for example, identify individuals as lesbian or gay, or as having a disability, regardless of whether such a person wants to 'come out'.

## Ways of working

Prejudice and discrimination can run through every activity of the union, which means that an activist either has to challenge all the time or select a few specific examples to pursue.

The rare occasions on which issues of disability or relevant to lesbians and gay men are raised may also mean that lesbian or gay activists with disabilities may be impatient with people who want to joke, be anecdotal or prove how 'right on' they are. Sometimes such lesbians and gay men may come across as aggressive or 'over the top'. This should be seen in the context of the personal demands that raising such issues make on the individual, as well as the history of disappointment or anger at obstruction, whether willful or unconscious, which may have occurred many times before.

The lesbian or gay member with a disability may be expected to analyse all the issues and other people's feelings, including their own, and come up with responses and solutions. If they don't they may be labelled 'stropky' or 'inadequate'.

## Meetings and socials

Workplace, branch and other union meetings are still often held in places or in ways which are not accessible, though making such events fully accessible for disabled people is NALGO policy. Individuals are forced to make extra efforts to get to meetings and to overcome the possible exclusion during them, including the probable lack of agenda items specifically addressing the needs of lesbians and gay men with disabilities.

As well as the good practice on access outlined in Chapter 4, it is important to look at meeting times and facilities, such as food and hot drinks and room temperatures. Challenges to exclusion and marginalisation of lesbians, gay men or disabled people should be taken up whether or not there are 'out' lesbians and gay men or people with disabilities present. The issues raised should, if possible, reflect those that disabled people and lesbians and gays have said they want challenged and should not be personalised in any way.

Branch socials may compound the problems of meetings. It may be assumed that lesbian and gay members with disabilities don't exist or, if they do, that they will not want to attend.

## Communicating

In order to counter offensive and exclusive language and stereotypes, it is necessary to challenge them and promote positive images in their place. NALGO members often use everyday language which is offensive to people with disabilities. Disability may be referred to in a negative way, such as 'management was blind and deaf to our appeal to withdraw this crippling proposal', or the language may impose a norm and exclude some members, such as 'stand up and be counted'.

The images used by branches in publicity should be positive: working with lesbians and gay men with disabilities as photographers and writers is the best way to do this. The photos and cartoons used by branches, whether of 'clients' or NALGO members, should also be positive and powerful and as representative as possible of all disabled people.

## Sponsorship

Branches have done much in recent years to sponsor charities, the arts and international projects, but they have sometimes supported organisations which use materials which reinforce stereotypes or hold events with poor access. They may support charities for disabled people which are not controlled by them, or which exclude lesbians and gay men with disabilities.

## Training

All training activities by and for NALGO should be reviewed to ensure that the issues of disability and sexuality are included appropriately. Reviews should include:

- ▼ training existing trainers
- ▼ recruitment of new trainers with appropriate skills, knowledge and experience
- ▼ looking at the form and content of training
- ▼ access which ensures full participation in training by disabled people.

## GETTING A BETTER DEAL

To redress the oppression of lesbians and gay men with disabilities requires change in

policies, practices and attitudes. This section highlights some issues which branches should take on when negotiating improved agreements and representing individual members. Persistence in creating opportunities and commitment to choice and control should be paramount.

## Representation

In representing lesbian and gay members with disabilities, the principles of offering choice and control should be consistently applied when agreeing who represents the member and how the issue is defined. There should also be a willingness (but not insistence) to involve either support groups within the union or outside, such as other people with disabilities and lesbian and gay groups.

Representing individual members, if the issue relates directly to sexuality or disability, may well involve questions of harassment or redeployment. Whatever the issue, it is vital that confidentiality is maintained.

## Equal opportunities

This section focuses on equal opportunities at work.

- ▼ People with disabilities and lesbians and gay men should be specifically included in all equal opportunities policies and practices.
- ▼ Equal opportunities advisers should be employed who are trained in equal opportunities for disabled people.
- ▼ Disability monitoring of employees and job applicants with disabilities is to be welcomed provided it is confidential, voluntary (but encouraged) and based on guided self-classification. Monitoring reports should take particular care not to expose individuals.
- ▼ Recruitment and selection procedures should be reviewed to eradicate the direct or indirect discrimination which can occur at all stages of job selection. These include the advertising media chosen; the wording of application forms and whether applications may be made in other ways; interview venues, support and questions; and medical tests.
- ▼ Jobs are often designed and described with a thoughtless assumption about how



they need to be done. Good management practice, such as use of person specifications based on minimum requirements and flexible division of labour, should be developed. For example, it is too often assumed that a job needs to be done by a car driver.

- ▼ Targeting a broad range of posts for people with disabilities should be encouraged. In the provision of services, being lesbian or gay and having a disability can provide additional knowledge and skills which should be reflected in person specifications. There are no legal obstacles to this.
- ▼ Equality training should include training on sexuality and disability. In some circumstances specific training about lesbian and gay rights or disability may be desirable, but most basic training should look at oppression in all its forms. Trainers with disabilities should be employed.

## Conditions of service

There are many issues which might affect lesbian and gay members with disabilities and which should be included when negotiating improved conditions for members.

- ▼ Some people with disabilities need support workers or enablers. This may involve reading, writing, interpreting or help with personal tasks, such as eating or going to the toilet. Such enablers should be provided for in conditions of service. The relationship with an enabler is a close one in which confidence and confidentiality is essential.
- ▼ Discrimination may arise from inflexible working hours and lack of adequate provision for carer's leave. Breakdown of carer or enabler arrangements should be included in special leave arrangements.
- ▼ There are many ways, physical and social, in which the working environment may be hostile to lesbians and gay men with disabilities. Physical aspects include lack of physical access, lack of information on what facilities are available, information only in writing, inadequate seating or lighting, background noise, unexpected hazards,

lack of car parking and public transport. Social hostility may involve various forms of harassment, ranging from the subtle to the crude.

- ▼ The specific forms of harassment of lesbians and gay men with disabilities experience may be unfamiliar to union reps, and management may condone or even be responsible for them. The victimisation could take the form of intense scrutiny of work or applying rules which are safely ignored by other staff. Existing grievance and disciplinary procedures should be amended to include such harassment. Disciplinary action against harassers should be taken and consideration given to moving them rather than moving the individual who has been harassed. The National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee is currently developing guidelines on harassment at work.
- ▼ Employers' occupational health schemes often discriminate by making a connection between disability and ill-health which does not exist. The fact that disabilities are often not static must also be borne in mind in representation; there may be changes in the effects of the impairment, often due to the environment. Stress may exacerbate these effects and introduce additional mental health disabilities. Stress itself can occur when lesbians and gay men with disabilities experience discrimination, and avoidable sickness absence may occur.
- ▼ Occupational health practice should be reviewed. Automatically giving prospective staff medicals if they have a disability should be stopped and discriminatory questions eliminated. Occupational health advisers should have training so that they are aware of good and bad practice for people with disabilities. A flexible approach is desirable, too, for example to allow the person on occasion to work at home if this would be easier.
- ▼ Car leasing arrangements should include provision for any conversions needed for people with disabilities. Essential Car User Allowances, car leasing and other transport assistance should be available to staff with disabilities who need a car at work or to get to work. Alternatives such as taxi allowances should be made

available. Priority car parking should be available, and its availability enforced.

- ▼ Life expectancy of people with disabilities can be shorter. For lesbians and gay men with disabilities, therefore, such issues as pension beneficiaries can be particularly important.
- ▼ If there are medical grounds for someone to change their job, management should consider job redesign first, then redeployment and then only early retirement. With redeployment, stewards should be conscious that formal procedures may reinforce discrimination and disadvantage, so simply accepting 'the rules' could be an inadequate response. For example, if agreements specify a limited number of offers of redeployment, it may be that real choice for people with disabilities requires more offers because of poor access and lack of employment prospects elsewhere.

## LESBIANS AND GAY MEN WITH DISABILITIES ORGANISING

Being active on issues both of lesbian and gay rights and disability is not easy for the reasons outlined above. This experience is not confined to NALGO or other unions but happens in disability groups too. Despite all the obstacles, however, lesbians and gay men with disabilities have organised themselves, with many lessons for trade union organisation.

Sisters Against Disablement (SAD)—founded in 1983 but no longer in existence—brought women together to develop a positive identity and a pride in disability as well as to challenge much internalised oppression. It campaigned for accessible venues, one of which was the London Lesbian and Gay Centre. From this work came the SAD access code, adopted by many other local authorities, an adapted version of which is printed in Chapter 4. Many lesbians with disabilities were involved with SAD.

In 1988 lesbians and gay men with disabilities from the group LANGUID (Lesbians and Gays Unite in Disability) organised a very successful conference. As

well as reinforcing pride, the conference helped disabled people, who might otherwise be isolated from other disabled people but still be called on to represent them, to be more accountable. The conference addressed challenging oppression, including effective ways of working within established groups such as trade unions. The group is currently in abeyance.

Image was the name given to local groups of black and minority ethnic people with disabilities set up in Hackney, Islington and Camden between 1987 and 1989. Well-attended meetings put forward proposals to local authorities, but unfortunately when funding stopped so did the meetings. The initiative was very important because it provided a forum for people not adequately represented either by mainly white disability groups or mainly able-bodied black and minority ethnic groups.

Euronetwork is a European network of lesbians and gay men with disabilities which organised a conference in May 1991 in the Netherlands. At the conference contacts were agreed in each country (see *Contacts* for the British one).

Regard is the only organisation of lesbians and gay men within the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People with representation at national level. Its work is primarily directed towards organisations of disabled people. See *Contacts*.

Other groups for lesbians and gay men with disabilities are listed in *Contacts*.

## SELF-ORGANISATION IN NALGO

Both lesbians and gay men and people with disabilities have been organising within NALGO for some time, and, as was described in Chapter 3, such self-organisation is a firmly established policy. NALGO branches should therefore support and resource lesbian and gay disability groups on the lines described in Chapter 4. Some unfortunately may need reminding that such self-organisation is NALGO policy—and policy not backed by resources is an insult to the membership.

Such groups should also be offered the opportunity to comment on branch business: the group should be on the mailing list for branch executive meetings and invited to



send representatives, but it should also be recognised that individuals in the group may not want to be identified and may prefer to comment in writing. Development of such groups may not always be best served by detailed formal reporting back to the branch executive—that could undermine groups' confidence, skills and knowledge building role.

## National Disability Committee

NALGO's National Disability Committee (NDC) is one of the four self-organised groups within the union, with groups at branch and district level which are open to all members with disabilities. The formal relationship between the NDC and the National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee (NLGCC) is outlined in Chapter 3.

Issues affecting lesbians and gay men with disabilities can be raised in branch and district disability and lesbian and gay groups, as well as branch and district equal opportunity committees and of course ordinary branch meetings.

## Caucus of lesbians and gay men with disabilities

The principal forum for lesbians and gay men with disabilities within the NLGCC is the Disability Caucus (see Chapter 3). Lesbians and gay men with disabilities meet separately every year at the National Lesbian and Gay Conference and elect representatives to sit on the NLGCC for the next year. Those representatives also meet separately at the beginning of NLGCC meetings to discuss issues they want to raise in the Co-ordinating Committee. Unfortunately there is currently no formal provision for lesbians and gay men with disabilities to meet during the year, but lesbians and gay men with disabilities who want to raise any issues should contact either their district representatives on the NLGCC or the representatives from the disability caucus so that items can be put on the agenda of the NLGCC. All representatives can be contacted via the Administration Section in NALGO headquarters' Service Conditions Department.

# CHAPTER 7

## Contacts

The following is a small selection of the numerous lesbian and gay organisations in Britain. Because contacts change quickly for many groups, we have concentrated on listing local switchboards and helplines which should be able to provide up to date contacts for other local organisations. The exception to this is that we have included several organisations of direct relevance to some of the issues discussed in the handbook or with which the National Lesbian and Gay Co-ordinating Committee has worked closely. As far as possible, too, we have included organisations of black lesbians and gay men and lesbians and gay men with disabilities. Much of the information is drawn from the monthly magazine *Gay Times*, in which a much more extensive list of contacts is available. The London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, the only 24-hour switchboard in the country, also has extensive contacts across the country.

## NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

### Albert Kennedy Trust

23 New Mount Street  
Manchester M4 4DE

### Black Lesbian and Gay Centre Project

BM Box 4390  
London WC1N 3XX  
081-885 3543

### Campaign for Homosexual Equality

PO Box 342  
London WC1X 0DU  
071-833 3912

### Euronetwork

c/o Camden Lesbian Centre and Black Lesbian Gay Group  
54-56 Phoenix Road  
London NW1 1ES  
Mon-Thur: 071-383 5405

### Gay Bereavement Project

Unitarian Rooms  
Hoop Lane  
London NW11 8BS  
Helpline: 081-455 8894  
Office 3-6pm: 081-200 0511

### Immunity

260a Kilburn Lane  
London W10 4BA  
081-968 8909

### International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)

c/o Nigel Warner  
141 Cloudesley Rd  
London N1

### Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights (LAGER)

St Margaret's House  
21 Old Ford Road  
London E2 9PL  
Mon-Fri 11am-5pm  
Lesbian line: 081-983 0694  
Gay line: 081-983 0696

### Lesbian and Gay Trade Union Confederation

c/o BM Rouge  
London WC1X 3NN  
Call Jon: 071-270 8649

### Regard

c/o London Boroughs Disability Resource Team  
125-133 Camden High Street  
London NW1 7JR  
071-482 5062

### Scottish Homosexual Rights Group

c/o SLGYM  
PO Box 69  
Glasgow G4 0TY

### The Stonewall Group

2 Greycoat Place  
London SW1P 1SB  
071-222 9007



## LONDON

### Black Lesbian Group

Camden Lesbian Centre and Black

Lesbian Group

54-56 Phoenix Road

London NW1

Mon-Thur, black lesbians only Thur 2-5pm:

071-383 5405

### Black Lesbian and Gay Helpline

Thurs 7-10pm: 071-837 5364

### Brothers and Sisters Gay Deaf Group

c/o 109 Kessock Close

Ferry Lane Estate

London N17 9PW

### Cairde (Irish lesbians)

071-837 2782

### Croydon Friend

PO Box 464

London SE5 4AT

Mon & Fri 7.30-9.30pm: 081-683 4239

### Cypriot Lesbians and Gays

071-837 2782

### Gemma (lesbians with disabilities)

BM Box 5700

London WC1N 3XX

### Hounslow Lesbian and Gay Helpline

Mon 7.30-10pm: 081-560 3040

### Irish Gay Men's Network

Mon 7.30-10pm: 081-983 4111

### Irish Lesbian Group

c/o London Irish Women's Centre

59 Stoke Newington Church Street

London N16

071-249 7318

### Jewish Lesbian Support Group

081-203 4029

### Lesbian Custody Project

c/o Rights of Women

52-54 Featherstone St

London EC1

071-251 6577

### Lesbian and Gay Black Group

081-678 6606

### Lesbian and Gay Fostering and Adoptive Parents' Group

c/o BM Friend

London WC1N 3XX

### Let's Rap (black men's discussion group)

081-885 3543/071 737 3881

**Link** (disabled lesbians, gay men and people with HIV)

Messages for Tim Hart c/o Outrage

071-490 7153

### London Friend

86 Caledonian Road, N1. Full access.

Helpline 7 days 7.30-10pm:

071-837 3337

Women's line Tues & Thurs 7.30-10pm:

071-837 2782

### London Gay Black Group

Camden Lesbian and Gay Unit

40 Theobalds Road

London WC1 8NW

071-495 2675; 071-404 4357

### London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Daily 24 hours: 071-837 7324

### London Lesbian Line

BM Box 1514

London WC1N 3XX

Mon & Fri 2-10pm, Tues-Thurs 8-10pm:

071-251 6911

**Long Yang Club** (gay orientals and western friends)

BCM/Wisdom

London WC1N 3XX

071-354 3834

**Onyx** (black lesbians and lesbians of colour)

071-837 2782

**Orientations** (Asian Pacific lesbians and gay men)

071-837 2782

**Shakti** (South Asian lesbian and gay network)

BM Box 3167

London WC1N 3XX

Women: 081-802 8981/081-885 3543

Men: 071 837 2782/081-993 9001

### Southwark Lesbian Line

Thurs 7.30-10pm: 071-703 3849

## EASTERN

### Bedford Lesbian and Gay Helpline

Tues 7.30-9.30pm (answerphone):

0234 218990

### Cambridge Friend

0233 246031

### Cambridge Lesbian Line

Fri 7-10pm: 0223 311753

### Cambridge Long Yang Club

0223 313328

### Colchester Gay Switchboard

Weds & Fri 6-10pm: 0206 42358

### Colchester Lesbian Line

Sun 8-10pm: 0206 870051

### Great Yarmouth Gay Helpline

Thurs & Sun 8-10pm: 0493 330954

### Harlow Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Tues, Thurs, Sun 8-11pm, Fri 8pm-

midnight, Sun women staffed:

0279 639637

### Lincoln Gay Switchboard

PO Box 200

Lincoln LN1 6AY

Weds & Thurs 7-10pm (or answerphone):

0522 569510

### Norfolk Friend

Fri, Sun 7-9pm, women Tues 8-10pm:

0603 628055

### Norwich Lesbian and Gay Line

Mon 8-10pm: 0603 592505

### Peterborough Friend

Tues/Thurs 7.30-9.30pm (or

answerphone): 0733 61499

### Suffolk Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Tues, Sat 7.30-10pm: 0473 232212

## MIDLANDS

### Birmingham Friend

7.30-9.30pm: 021-622 7351

### Birmingham Lesbian and Gay Black Group

021-622 6589

### Birmingham Lesbian Line

Mon 7.30-9.30pm: 021-622 6536

### Birmingham Long Yang Club

Nicolas: 021-745 4888

### Birmingham Shakti

021-622 7351

### Coventry Friend

PO Box 8, Coventry CV1 1GF

Weds, Fri 7.30-9.30pm: 0203 714199

### Derby Friend

Weds 7-10pm: 0332 49333

### Glossop Lesbian and Gay Helpline

Tues 2-4pm, Fri 7-9pm: 0457 865722

### Hereford and Worcester Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

PO Box 156, Worcester WR5 1BP

Tues-Fri 7.30-9.30pm: 0905 723097

### Leicester Lesbian and Gay Line

Mon-Fri 7.30-10pm (women answer Tues)

Phone accessible for deaf & hearing

impaired: 0533 550667

### Northampton Gay Line

Tues 6.30-9.30pm: 0604 39722

### Northampton Lesbian Line

Tues 6.30-9.30: 0604 39723

### North Notts Gay Advice

Mon-Thurs office hours: 0777 709650

### Nottingham Gay Switchboard

Mon-Fri 7-10pm: 0602 4411454

### Nottingham Lesbian Line

Mon, Weds 7.30-9pm: 0602 410652

### Shrewsbury Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

PO Box 41, Wellington, Telford

Tues, Fri 8-10pm: 0743 232393

### Stoke on Trent Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

PO Box 1, 46 Marsh St, Hanley

Mon, Weds, Fri 8-10pm, Sun 1-3pm:

0782 266998

### West Midlands Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

c/o 37 Thorp St. B5 4AU

7-10pm, Minicom available: 021-622

6589

## SOUTH WEST

### Bristol Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

c/o 8 Sommerville Rd

Bishopston BS7 8DH

7.30-10.30pm daily, 2-5pm Sun, women

answer Wed

Minicom: 0272 420842/425927

### Bristol Lesbian Line

c/o Women's Centre

82 Colston St, Bristol BS1 5BB

Tues, Thurs 7.30-10pm: 0272 290855

### Cornwall Lesbian Line (Hayle)

Thurs 8-10pm: 0736 62869

### Dorset Lesbian and Gay Helpline

PO Box 316, Bournemouth, BH1 4HL

Tues-Fri 7.30-10.30pm (or answerphone):

0202 318822



**Gay and Lesbian Counselling Southwest**

PO Box 178, Exeter EX4 1TY  
Mon 7.30-10pm: 0392 422016

**Plymouth Lesbian Line**

Tues 7.30-9.30pm: 0752 261251

**Swindon/Wiltshire Lesbian and Gay Line**

PO Box 40, Swindon, SN1 3QR  
0793 644585

**SOUTH/SOUTH EAST****Berkshire Gay Switchboard**

Wed 8-10pm: 0753 856521

**Brighton Area Action Against Section 28**

c/o Brighton Unemployed Centre, 6  
Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY  
0273 671213

**Brighton Gay Switchboard**

IB/Lambda, PO Box 449, BN1 1UU  
Mon-Sat 6-10pm: 0273 690825

**Brighton Lesbian Line**

Tues, Fri 8-10pm: 0273 603298

**Canterbury Lesbian Line**

Fri 7-10pm: 0227 464570

**East Kent Friend**

Tues 7.30-10pm: 0843 588762

**Medway and Maidstone Lesbian and Gay Switchboard**

PO Box 53, Chatham, ME4 5QQ  
Thurs, Fri 7.30-9.30pm: 0634 826925

**Milton Keynes Gay and Lesbian Switchboard**

PO Box 153, Milton Keynes MK11 3AA  
Men Mon 7-9pm, women Thurs 7-9pm:  
0908 666226

**Oxford Gay Switchboard**

PO Box 7, Standlake, Oxford, OX8 7GG  
7-9pm: 0865 793999

**Oxford Lesbian Line**

Weds 7-10pm: 0865 242333

**Portsmouth Lesbian Line**

PO Box 38, Portsmouth  
Thurs 8-10pm: 0705 876999

**Reading Helpline/Friend**

PO Box 75, Reading RG1 7DU  
Tues & Fri 8-10pm: 0734 597269

**Solent Gay Switchboard**

PO Box 139, Southampton SO9 7JE  
Mon-Fri 7.30-10pm: 0703 637363

**Solent Lesbian Line**

PO Box 139, Southampton SO9 7JE  
Tues, Thurs 7-10pm, Fri 1-4pm: 0703  
671570

**Sussex Gay Men's Disabled Group**

c/o Hastings Befrienders,  
PO Box 6, St Leonards on Sea

**NORTH OF ENGLAND****Blackpool Gay Helpline**

Daily 8-10pm: 0253 752105

**Bradford Lesbian and Gay Switchboard**

Tues, Thurs-Sat 7.30-9.30pm:  
0274 722206

**Bradford Lesbian Line**

Thurs 7-9pm (or answerphone): 0274  
305525

**Bradford Shakti**

South Asian lesbians and gay men  
0274 723802/722206

**Carlisle Switchboard**

Weds, Thurs 7-10pm: 0965 31171

**Cleveland Lesbian Line (Stockton on Tees)**

Weds 8-10pm: 0642 217955

**Cumbria and Borders Helpline (Carlisle)**

6-8pm: 059 681244

**Gay Men's Disabled Group**

PO Box 153, Manchester, M60 1CP

**Huddersfield Gay Switchboard**

Sun 6-9pm, Tues 7-9pm: 0484 538070

**Hull Lesbian Line**

Mon 7-9pm: 0482 563288

**Lancaster Gay and Lesbian Switchboard**

Thurs, Fri 7-9pm: 0524 847437

**Leeds Gay Switchboard**

7-10pm (except Tues): 0532 453588

**Leeds Lesbian Line**

Tues 7.30-9.30pm: 0532 453588

**Manchester Black Lesbian and Gay Group**

Daily 4-10pm: 061-274 3999

**Manchester Disabled Lesbians Group**

061-273 5033, Minicom 061-273 5083

**Manchester Gay Switchboard**

Daily 4-10pm: 061-274 3999

**Manchester Lesbian Link**

Mon-Thurs 6-9pm: 061-236 6205

**Manchester Long Yang Club**

Paul: 061-737 2649

**Manchester Triangle Club** (deaf lesbians and gays)

Gay Centre, PO Box 153, Manchester  
M60 1LP

**Manchester Women's Gay Disabled Group**

PO Box 14, South West District Office,  
Manchester M15 5NE

**Merseyside Friend**

051-708 9552  
Women's line Tues: 051-708 0234

**Newcastle Friend**

Mon-Fri 7-10pm, Minicom:  
091-261 8555

**Newcastle Lesbian Line**

Tues 7-10pm, Minicom: 091-261 2277

**Preston Lesbian Line**

Mon, Weds 8-9.30pm: 0772 51122

**Preston Switchboard**

Tues, Thurs, Fri 7.30-9.30pm; Sat 1-3pm:  
0772 51122

**Rochdale Lesbian and Gay Switchboard**

Tues 7-9pm: 0706 59964

**Scunthorpe Gay Helpline**

Weds and Fri 7-9pm: 0724 271661

**Sheffield Gayphone**

Mon, Weds 7.30-9.30pm:  
0742 588199

**Sheffield Lesbian Line**

Thurs 7-10pm: 0742 581238

**Teeside Friend (Middlesbrough)**

Tues and Fri 7.30-9.30pm, Minicom:  
0642 248888

**Warrington Gay Helpline**

Mon, Weds 7-10pm: 0925 59572

**York Gay Switchboard**

Thurs 7-9pm: 0904 411399

**York Lesbian Line**

Fri 7-9pm (or answerphone):  
0904 646812

**Yorkshire Shakti**

0274 723802

**SCOTLAND****Aberdeen Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Switchboard**

Weds 7-10pm: 0224 586869

**Edinburgh Gay Switchboard**

PO Box 38, EH1 3UU  
7-10 pm daily: 031-556 4049

**Edinburgh Lesbian Line**

PO Box 169, EH1 3UU  
Mon, Thurs 7.30-10pm: 031-557 0751

**Fife Friend**

PO Box 19, Kirkcaldy KY1 3JF  
Women Mon 7.30-10.30, Men Fri 7.30-  
10.30pm: 0592 266688

**Forth Friend**

PO Box 28, Stirling FK9 5YW  
Mon 7.30-10pm: 0786 71285

**Glasgow Lesbian Line**

Weds 7-10pm: 041-552 5768

**Glasgow Long Yang Club**

Robert: 041 334 7144

**Strathclyde Gay & Lesbian Switchboard**

PO Box 38, Glasgow G2 2QF  
7-10 pm: 041-221 8372

**WALES****Cardiff Friend**

PO Box H79, CF 8YJ  
Tues-Sat 8-10pm: 0222 340101

**Cardiff Lesbian Line**

Tues 8-10pm: 0222 374051

**Cardiff Long Yang Club**

David: 0222 708653

**Gwynedd Gay Line**

c/o Greenhouse  
1 Trevelyan Terrace  
Bangor LL57 1AX  
Fri 7-9pm: 0248 351263

**Gwynedd Lesbian Line**

Tues 6-8pm: 0248 351263

**Swansea Lesbian Line**

Weds 7-9pm: 0792 651955

**West Glamorgan Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Switchboard**

PO Box 348, Swansea SA1 1XE