Education:
Lesbian and Gay Students

Developing Equal Opportunities

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FOREWORD

Education: Lesbian and Gay Students: Developing Equal Opportunities is a welcome and valuable report. Gay HIV Strategies are to be commended for commissioning this research and for their wider work in this area.

This publication is an important addition to a growing body of literature on the experience, situation and aspirations of lesbians, gays and bisexuals. This is a body of literature that:

- secures a necessary visibility for gays, lesbians and bisexuals
- generates knowledge and understanding of the discrimination they experience
- charts out new ways to realise equality for gays, lesbians and bisexuals and to celebrate the diversity they represent.

The experience of gay and lesbian students and pupils is detailed in this report. A commonality of experience is established nationally and internationally - an experience that can involve harassment, diminished self-esteem, early school leaving, fear and even suicide. This is an experience we are all challenged to change with urgency.

This report explores initiatives already taken within the education system to change this situation and identifies further steps that could be taken. Education and the education system have a threefold contribution to make. Firstly the education system involves a key relationship with the individual pupil or student. Secondly education has a central role in transmitting our values as a society - values that need to include a respect for diversity and a commitment to equality. Thirdly the education system is a large employer and can set important standards in accommodating difference and challenging discrimination in the workplace. This is a wide agenda and requires the contribution of many different actors.

The difficulties to be overcome are significant. The survey of secondary schools in England and Wales quoted in the report established the wide range of these difficulties. The range covered included parental disapproval, lack of experienced staff and the lack of policy. Moving forward in this context will require a holistic and all embracing strategy.

The way forward suggested by the report reflects three key elements of a strategy for change.

These are:

- partnership with the gay and lesbian community.
- targeting resources in providing dedicated supports and in contributing to what is described as a "burgeoning gay/lesbian culture".
- mainstreaming, where lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils and students are a named focus within mainstream initiatives in curriculum development, in school management and in teacher training.

New equality legislation provides an important resource for change. The Equality Authority is mandated to combat discrimination experienced by, and to promote equality for bisexuals, lesbians and gays. The forthcoming report of the Advisory

Committee we have established on the equality agenda for gays, lesbians and bisexuals will be a foundation for our contribution to necessary change. We look forward to making this contribution.

Niall Crowley
CEO, The Equality Authority

PREFACE

This comprehensive report is the first to concentrate on the difficulties and problems of gay, lesbian and bisexual students in first and second level education in Ireland. It is in part a follow on from the 1996 Combat Poverty Agency study *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men: the Economic and Social Effects of Discrimination*, which documented the extent of educational disadvantage and underachievement among lesbians and gay men.

More importantly, this report maps out the complex area of educational policy and programmes, and sets out the first steps towards the goals of equality of access, participation, outcome and achievement in the field of education. It identifies both the considerable potential within the education system to support and resource lesbians and gay students, and the areas where respect for diversity can be included as a realisable programme goal.

It is an opportune time for such a report, with the national goals of combating educational disadvantage and promoting equality. The recommendations outline a clear strategy towards achieving these goals for lesbians and gay men. The Department of Education and Science have a central role in developing policies and programmes towards this aim, but all agencies working in education – including schools, teachers unions, other statutory agencies and government departments – can and must play a leading role in addressing the issues raised in the report.

We are indebted to Eoin Collins of Nexus Research Co-Operative for his considerable commitment and expertise in researching and developing this report and it's recommendations. Kieran Rose, the former Gay HIV Strategies Project Director, was instrumental in setting out the parameters for and guiding the project. Our gratitude also goes to our benefactors who made this study possible. We would like to thank most sincerely those who contributed their ideas, thoughts and goodwill to the development of the report, which showed that there is significant recognition of the problems and support for well thought out and practical initiatives to tackle the issues. We would also like to thank and encourage the many lesbian and gay activists who have sought to make inroads in to the educational field to date.

Gay HIV Strategies is an NGO, core funded by the Department of Health and Children, with the objective of facilitating effective HIV prevention strategies for gay men, based on a partnership between the statutory sector, the gay community and other agencies. [1] The project builds on the approach of the Department of Health and Children that a range of agencies and sectors have a critical effect on the health status of the population, and that there is a health dimension to public policy in other areas. There is widespread recognition that there is a correlation between educational attainment and health status, particularly with regard to HIV prevention.

This report is our contribution to the development of a more equal and accessible education system. We identify it as a major strategic resource and the first phase of a project to realise the opportunities presented by developments in the education system for gay students. We hope it will be of use to policy makers, teachers,

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[1]   The project is based on the report and recommendations of *HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community* (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network/Nexus, 1996)

parents, the lesbian, gay and bisexual community and practitioners involved in education.

Brian Sheehan
Project Director, Gay HIV Strategies

1   INTRODUCTION

There has been a growing awareness, both in Ireland and internationally, of the problems encountered by young gay people in the education system. These problems, according to the Combat Poverty Agency study *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men* (1995), include bullying and harassment, isolation, depression and poor self esteem leading in some cases to poor educational attainment and/or early school leaving. The study also found that there was a marked reluctance on the part of those who had experienced problems at school to talk to anyone about their problems, least of all official sources of help.

A considerable opportunity has now arisen for the development of effective strategies for addressing these problems. The Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Bill (1999), due to be finalised in the near future, each includes sexual orientation as one of the categories for protection against discrimination. The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination in areas of vocational training. The Equal Status Bill will also have particular relevance to education in that it provides specific protections against harassment in schools, including harassment that might arise on the basis of a persons actual or perceived sexual orientation.

The Equality Authority, which was established in 1999 to implement the equality legislation, established an Advisory Group to advise the Authority on appropriate directions to tackle discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The Group comprises representatives from the lesbian and gay community, social partners and key Government departments, including the Department of Education and Science.

There have also been significant developments within the education system itself. This has included an greater emphasis on the principles of 'equality' and 'partnership' and an increased focus on addressing educational disadvantage. In line with these principles, a range of polices and programmes have been developed to foster a safer and more supportive learning environment including measures to combat bullying and to build the self-esteem of children. Also important has been a greater openness around sexuality that is reflected in programmes such as Relationships and Sexuality Education and the pilot initiative 'Exploring Masculinities'.

The following report outlines the results of the first phase of an action research project, commissioned by Gay HIV Strategies, to help realise the opportunities presented by these and other initiatives in the education system in addressing problems faced by young gay people. The report begins with a review of the problem, drawing on relevant research literature from Ireland and overseas on the difficulties faced by lesbian and gay students. The literature review also identifies policy and programme responses to these difficulties that have particular relevance to the Irish context.

The report goes on to outline developments in the overall policy context, including key legislative and other provisions for the promotion of equality and the progress made by the gay and lesbian community in terms of meeting the needs of gay people. Developments in the education sector are then outlined, the focus in this respect being on policies and programmes at primary and second level that have particular relevance in terms of addressing the problems faced by young gay people in education. Also identified are the main resources for teachers including teacher

training and other supports which have direct relevance for promoting awareness and developing approaches to meeting the needs of gay school goers.

The report concludes with recommendations on how the various polices and programmes identified could be expanded and supported so as to ensure a safer and more supportive environment for gay people in school.

First and second level education are examined in this report. There is need for a further study focussing on third level education, which should be undertaken by the Higher Education Authority. There is also a growing emphasis on Adult or Second Chance education, which is outside the scope of this study. This area needs further work to ensure that lesbians and gay men are included as a specific target group for second chance education to redress any educational disadvantage. In addition, training currently occurring in various areas within the lesbian and gay community should be recognised and supported as successful and effective adult education.

1.1 SPECIFIC AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principal aims of this report, the first such report on these issues, are:

- To provide a resource document for educational practitioners by documenting the issues arising for gay people at school and identifying best practice approaches in dealing with the problems they face;

- To provide a resource document for the lesbian and gay community by identifying polices, programmes and various organisational structures through which the needs of lesbian and gay school-goers can be addressed;

- To promote greater understanding and awareness of the effects of discrimination and prejudice as it effects young gay people in school;

- To identify strategies and measures to establish a safer and more supportive environment for gay people in the school system.

1.2 METHODS

The report is based on an extensive review of relevant literature and consultations held with key personnel in the education sector in Ireland and abroad. Agencies/personnel consulted in this respect included:

- Anne Looney, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.
- Claire Ryan, Co-ordinator, Pilot Programme for 8-15 Year Olds.
- Patricia Shanahan, Co-ordinator, Stay Safe Programme.
- Nora Brennan, Co-ordinator, Relationships and Sexuality Education.
- Máire Leydon, Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland.
- Stephen McCarthy, Co-ordinator, Civic, Social and Political Education.
- Sheila Drudy, Department of Education, Maynooth College.
- Maureen Bohan, Co-ordinator, 'Exploring Masculinities' Programme, Department of Education and Science.
- Sally Shiels, Former President of the INTO.

- Niamh Breathnach, Former Minister for Education.
- Owen Metcalfe, Chief Education Officer, Chief Education Officer, Department of Health and Children.
- Eddie Conlon, Teachers Union of Ireland;
- Senator Joe O'Toole, Irish National Teachers Organisation.
- Des Rainey, President, and the staff of the Irish National Teachers Organisation
- Kim Westheimer, Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Lesbian and Gay Youth.
- Pat Doherty, New York City Comptrollers Office.
- Sean Cahill and Urvashi Vaid, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, New York
- Kate Frankfurt, Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, New York.
- Christopher Rodriguez, Hetrick Martin Institute and Harvey Milk School, New York.
- Fionnuala Kilfeather, National Parents Council.
- Sharon O'Halloran, Lesbian Education and Awareness.
- Cathleen Brennan, Guidance Counsellor.
- Karl Hayden, Gay Community Education Activist.

2. GAY PEOPLE AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

"Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth sit in every classroom, in every school in our communities. Often invisible, they are required by law to attend institutions which often ignore or stigmatise them. Some of their teachers are unprepared to recognise their existence publicly or to respond appropriately to their needs. Other teachers, including many who are themselves lesbian gay or bisexual, are engaged in on-going efforts, often in the face of tremendous resistance, to ensure that the school experiences of such students are positive ones (Monahan, 1997; 203).

2.1 IRELAND

The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) report **Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men** (1995) documents the most comprehensive study yet undertaken on the extent and nature of anti-gay prejudice and discrimination in Ireland. The study, which was based on a survey of gay people in Dublin and Cork, sets out to explore how discrimination and the fear of discrimination impacts on the levels of poverty and exclusion amongst lesbians and gay men and to establish the needs of those most at risk of experiencing poverty. The study focused not just on income adequacy, but also on how discrimination affects people's lives in terms of their relationship with family and friends, education and training, employment, access to resources such as housing and state benefits, health, harassment and violence and emigration.

Approximately half (49%) of the respondents to the CPA study became aware of their sexuality before the age of fifteen when they were particularly vulnerable and dependent, especially in economic terms. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents stated that the gradual awareness of their sexual orientation had caused them problems. Many of these problems had been experienced when in school or college. For example, three fifths (57%) of respondents experienced various problems at school, the vast majority of whom describe such problems arising as a result of being gay or lesbian. The problems included isolation, depression, poor self-esteem and harassment and bullying. Eight percent of respondents who experienced problems in school subsequently left earlier than anticipated (1995: 51). As one young gay man put it:

"I just couldn't put up with the bullying, so I had decided I would leave basically. I used to mitch quite a lot anyway. The day I told my mother I was leaving school was the greatest feeling I ever had. It was doing me in mentally and physically. I just wasn't able for it anymore. I was, what, fourteen and I was a nervous wreck. I didn't learn how to read and write until I left school and started reading things I was interested in" (1995; 47).

The absence or perceived absence of assistance or support for gay people experiencing problems in school was apparent from the research. Of the 91 respondents who had experienced problems, only six people told a teacher about them, while four told a school counsellor. Most of those who did tell someone told parents (16 respondents), friends (19 respondents) or lesbian and gay friends (13 respondents). Others simply went outside their school, family or friends in order to discuss the problems they encountered with their sexual orientation. According to one gay man:

"I came out when I was in 5th year in school. I had no information about being gay but had heard of the word and set about finding out more. The first place I rang was the Samaritans who gave the usual 'are you feeling suicidal routine'. I kept ringing

> back and on the third occasion they gave me information about REACH (a Christian
> gay group).

Three fifths (59%) of those who had gone to third level college and a third (36%) of those who had been on training courses had experienced similar problems to those experienced at school. The majority of those who experienced such problems stated that they were due to being lesbian or gay. Incidents of harassment and bullying, however, were less prevalent in college than in school (1995: 49).

On the positive side however, the study found that the vast majority of those who did 'come out' had improved their lives 'considerably' or in 'some ways' as a result.

The Combat Poverty Agency report set out a range of recommendations to deal with the issues raised in the report. The following were put forward in relation to education:

- The Department of Education should develop an anti-discrimination programme of action to tackle the problems of discrimination and underachievement identified in this study.

- Harassment and bullying of lesbian and gay students should be urgently addressed in the context of the overall anti-bullying programme.

- Training should be provided by the Department of Education for management, teachers and counsellors to assist them in providing a supportive learning environment for all students, including those who are lesbian or gay.

- An equality Code of Practice relevant to management, teachers and students should be developed by the Department of Education which would deal with all forms of prejudice, discrimination and harassment, including on the basis of sexual orientation.

- Issues relating to equal citizenship and human rights as well as the problems of prejudice, discrimination and poverty should be included in the school curriculum.

The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People at School in the Northwest of Ireland (Foyle Friend, 1999) is a report based on a small survey undertaken in 1998 of young people in Derry, Donegal and Tyrone who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. It confirms many of the results a of the Combat Poverty Agency Report. Of the 31 gay or bisexual boys who responded: one described having attempted suicide (although this question was not asked in the survey); two spent time in a psychiatric hospital and 11 felt that their school work had been adversely affected. Similar results were reported by lesbian respondents including negative impacts on their school work and on their lives more generally, owing to the severity and extent of anti-gay bullying (1999:5). Experiences of bullying reported in this study were generally not once-off incidents but continuous harassment which extended beyond the school environment. As one respondent put it:

> "I got verbal, physical and mental torture. I was called names, the other boys spat on
> my back and in my face. They wrote homophobic graffiti on my property. My brother
> started getting it too and my mother got abuse shouted at her about me (1999: 12).

The impact of prejudice against lesbians and gay men has also recently been covered in the Sisters of Mercy Western Province report ***Challenging Voices: Pathways to Change*** (1999). Gay people interviewed by the authors reported

experiencing considerable difficulties arising from the general climate or environment of anti gay prejudice. As one interviewee put it:

> "A lot of gays and lesbians would know from an early age that they're different. If you're equated with something wrong or disgusting, you've to deal with that as well as coming to terms with your own sexuality"(1999: 81).

Education and schooling were perceived to be critically important areas where checks and balances on anti-gay prejudice would be most effective and appropriate. However, these areas were perceived by those interviewed to be quite prejudicial (1999:84). According to one interviewee:

> "All elements of your education pre-suppose you're heterosexual . There's never a sense or an element of choice. When it is mentioned, its in a derogatory way – even in religious education. With the books, all the heroes are men, couples are married and heterosexual. The books are gendered anyway but they're also heterosexual. In sex education too, there's nothing or very little, about gays and lesbians (1999: 83).

The link between sexual orientation and educational disadvantage has also been noted by Waterford Regional Youth Services in its report ***Seen and Heard: A Report into the Needs of Young People in Waterford*** (1996). In a section dealing with "more excluded youth" it states that young people who are gay or lesbian "can become the subject of harassment or abuse" and have "very specific developmental needs" (1996: 43). The report referred to the need for "education around sexual orientation" and called for innovative responses to be designed and delivered in consultation with various interest groups in the voluntary sector who have firsthand experience of specific issues, including sexuality and sexual orientation (1996: 45).

Other useful sources on responding to the needs of gay youth in Ireland include:

- ***OutYouth: A Report on the Dublin Gay and Lesbian Youth Group Pilot Project*** (O'Brien, 1998)[2]. Describes the results of a pilot project of support for the youth group sponsored by Gay Switchboard Dublin, supported by Gay HIV Strategies and funded by the Eastern Health Board as part of a HIV prevention strategy development process. The report provides very useful information on the factors constraining the development of a group of this kind. It outlines a broad set of recommendations for statutory and voluntary agencies to meet the needs of young gay people.

- ***Professional Training for Youth Workers on Issues for Gay Youth: An Outline Curriculum Proposal*** (Nexus Research/Gay HIV strategies, forthcoming) was sponsored by Waterford Regional Youth Services and Southern Gay Health Project. The curriculum proposal contained in the report was developed following a detailed literature review, interviews conducted with key personnel in youth services agencies and two pilot professional development sessions held with youth workers on issues of health promotion for gay youth.

- ***Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Experiences of School*** (Barron, 1999) is a thesis undertaken for Maynooth University and the City of Dublin Youth Services Board Youth Studies Course. The thesis is based on a survey of young gay people and provides interesting insights into their experiences at school.

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2 .   This report has been distributed by the Youth Information Resource Centre to all Youth Information Centres.

2.2 INTERNATIONAL

There is a considerable amount of international literature relating to the needs of gay people in education. This includes very valuable documentation on innovative approaches to tackling the problems and difficulties faced by lesbians and gay men in school. While it is not possible to provide a complete review of that literature in this study, the following initiatives, studies and policy papers were found to be particularly useful in relation to identifying the needs of gay students and developing strategies to meet them.

One of the most significant responses to the needs of lesbian and gay school-goers has been a Programme undertaken by the State of Massachusetts. In 1992, the Governor of Massachusetts established the Governors Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, comprising members drawn from the state and NGO sectors, including two high school students, two parents of lesbian and gay children, and a number of teachers and 'human service' professionals.

The Commission then held a series of five public hearings across the state from which testimony was taken from lesbian and gay students on their experiences at school. Based on this consultation, and with reference to key national research, a report was drawn up entitled ***Making Schools Safer for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Breaking the Silence in Schools and in Families***. The report outlined some of the key issues facing gay youth highlighted at the Commission's Public hearings. For example:

- *Harassment:* A national survey undertaken in 1984 by the US National Lesbian and Gay Task Force found that 45 percent of males and 20 percent of females experienced verbal or physical assaults in secondary school because they were perceived to be lesbian or gay.
- *Isolation and suicide:* The 1989 *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* (US Department of Health and Human Services) found that gay and lesbian youth comprise 30% of completed youth suicides. Gay and lesbian youth were also found to be 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide. Isolation and harassment at school were identified as possible causal factors of actual or attempted suicide.
- *Drop-out and Poor School Performance.* The *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide* estimated that 28% of gay and lesbian youth drop out of school because of discomfort in the school environment. The same report also estimated that gay males, lesbian and bisexual youth comprise as many as 25 percent of all youth living on the streets in the United States.
- Submissions to the Governor's Commission show a range of difficulties experienced by young people in 'coming out' to their families ranging from avoidance and lack of support to outright rejection. According *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide*, 26 percent of young gay people are forced to leave home because of conflicts over their sexual orientation.

The Commission's Report outlined a series of recommendations for addressing these problems in the State of Massachusetts. Based on the recommendations, the State Board of Education voted in 1993 to adopt a number of steps to improve the safety of schools and school-based support services for lesbian and gay students. These included the following:

1. Schools are encouraged to develop policies protecting gay and lesbian students from harassment, violence and discrimination.

2. Schools are encouraged to offer training to school personnel in violence prevention and suicide prevention.
3. Schools are encouraged to offer school-based support groups for gay, lesbian and heterosexual students.
4. Schools are encouraged to provide school-based counselling for family members of gay and lesbian students.

Similar approaches have now been adopted in the State of Rhode Island. Here, a Task Force on Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Youth was established comprising government officials, service providers, youth, parents, educators and administrators from the Rhode Island Departments of Health and Education. The Task Force organised a State-wide Forum on education involving all stakeholders in the education process, including young people themselves, and produced a report entitled **School Shouldn't Hurt: Lifting the Burden from Gay, Lesbian and Transgendered Youth** (1995). The Forum, as set out in the report, identified similar issues for young gay people as had been identified in Massachusetts, including harassment and violence, isolation, suicide and lack of response from teachers and other relevant service providers. Similar recommendations were also put forward including need for policies to protect gay students, training for teachers, and actions to promote dialogue among students, educators and parents on issues relating to homophobia and school safety.

Making the Grade: Responding to Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth in Schools (Monahan 1997) provides a very useful summary of the literature (mainly from North America) on the key issues for lesbians and gay men that need to be addressed by schools. The first issue concerns safety. As Monahan puts it:

> "No child or youth should have to fear for his or her physical safety while attending an educational institution and no student should anticipate that attending school will be detrimental to his or her mental health" (1997: 204).

Yet it is in the school that lesbians and gay men are particularly vulnerable to anti-gay violence. For example, a United States Department of Justice report stated that gay males and lesbians are the most frequent victims of hate crimes and that school is the primary setting for this type of violence (1997: 204). Even in school settings where there is no documented violence towards gay students, the fear of violence has a profound effect. The ability to behave naturally, disclose one's sexuality and/or seek support becomes controlled by fear.

In addition to providing for physical safety, schools have a responsibility to ensure that attending school is not detrimental to the mental health of students. One of the most common experiences, which can erode a student's sense of well being, is constant exposure to verbal harassment. Students who are perceived to be lesbian, gay or bisexual, according to Monahan, are the most accessible targets for this type of abuse. While studies have found that gay students were verbally harassed in most cases by other students, in some cases the source of harassment has been a teacher. The harassment in these cases could take the form of direct attacks, as in the case of teachers making homophobic jokes or comments, or in the form of collusion with students who do the same (1997: 206).

Students, according to Monahan, respond in a variety of ways to threats to their physical and mental health. However; "their coping mechanisms must be viewed, not as failures but as legitimate responses to school systems which have failed them" (1997:206). One significant coping mechanism is for lesbian and gay students to avoid school and Monahan refers to various research studies documenting high rates of truancy among lesbians and gay men, academic failure, switching schools and

ultimately, dropping out of school entirely. Problems of early school leaving were found to be particularly acute among students who were open about their sexuality or who were unable to "pass" as heterosexual.

An obvious coping strategy for gay and lesbian youth is to conceal their sexual orientation, resulting in active attempts to "pass" as heterosexual - although this may not be sufficient to avoid harassment. This attempt to appear 'normal' can, according to Monahan, have a significant, unmeasurable cost to their development process, self-esteem and sense of connection (1997: 207).

While actual or fear of harassment can lead students to withdraw from school, there is also evidence of some lesbian and gay students trying to compensate by over-achieving in academic and/or social circles. Although these strategies may elicit more social acceptance than dropping out of school entirely, each, Monahan states, carries its own consequences. "Students who concentrate all their energies into academic achievements often become isolated from their peers and have limited opportunities to develop significant social relationships. Those who overcompensate through active but 'closeted' social lives bear the burden of a distorted sense of self" (1997: 208).

Playing it Safe: Responses of Secondary School Teachers to Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pupils, Bullying, HIV and AIDS, Education and Section 28 (Douglas et al, 1997) is the report of a study based on a survey of secondary schools in England and Wales. The survey was designed to identify their perceptions of, among other things, experiences of bullying within schools, ways in which schools endeavoured to meet the needs of lesbian and gay students, and teaching about HIV and AIDS.

Eighty two percent of teachers interviewed were aware of incidents of homophobic verbal bullying and 26% were aware of physical bullying of this nature accompanied by homophobic name calling. The effects of such bullying varied, in some cases leading to early school leaving. According to one head teacher interviewed the effects of such bullying included:

> "diminishing or total loss of self-confidence, likewise self–esteem, withdrawing into a shell, no communication, obviously being very unhappy and that affecting friendships, affecting them in terms of motivation towards work, motivation towards school, being off school and feigning illnesses with parents and obviously, at the most severe level, refusing to come to school" (Douglas et al, 1997: 24).

While most schools had a general policy on bullying, only 6% had a policy that included reference to lesbian and gay related bullying. When asked about the factors that might hinder them in tackling homophobic bullying, the three most commonly cited by responding teachers were;

- parental disapproval,
- lack of experienced staff, and
- lack of a policy.

Concern about the responses of the local community and homophobia within staff teams was also discussed in the interviews. Interestingly, those schools which had developed innovative or effective approaches to tackling bullying were often reluctant to disseminate details about these approaches due to a concern that it would be construed as 'bad publicity' (1997:28).

Some very useful information on the practical lessons learned in attempting to meet the needs of gay students is contained in ***The High School Journal*** published in the United States. For example, one article documents the experiences of *Project 10*, a

model programme developed in the Fairfax School District of Los Angeles to meet the various needs of lesbian and gay students (Uribe, 1993). The focus of the Project is education, reduction of verbal and physical abuse, suicide prevention and dissemination of accurate AIDS information. The method in which this is carried out is through workshops for teachers, counsellors and other personnel, and through support groups set up in each senior high school for students dealing with sexual orientation issues. The support groups were an extremely important part of the Programme and provided, through the assistance of facilitators/counsellors, assistance for students in dealing with a range of issues including sexual orientation (1994: 111).

The article draws out lessons from *Project 10* that were considered to be of particular relevance to school administrators if the needs of their lesbian and gay students are to be met. For example, the Programme found that teachers were often ill-prepared to discuss homosexuality in their classrooms or else expressed concern about accusations of 'condoning' or 'promoting' it. These problems it was found, could be overcome if the school adopted a strong 'non-discrimination' policy that included sexual orientation as one of the protected categories. An integrated strategy could then be developed to implement this policy, including the development of appropriate curricula that allowed for broad discussion around sexual orientation that did not lapse into sexually explicit conversations.

The existence and support for the 'non-discrimination' policy also provided protection for teachers if a complaint from a parent should arise. In such a case, the parent concerned was asked to put their complaint in writing, specifically stating their objections and the reasons for them. These could then be reviewed by the school authorities in the light of the 'non-discrimination' policy adopted by the school.

Gay and Lesbian Students: Understanding their Needs (Besner and Spungin 1995) provides an interesting summary (based on experience in the US) on the ways in which help can be provided for lesbian and gay students. Besner and Spungin acknowledge the problems faced by schools in developing services or curricula which are perceived by some parents, or people in the wider community, as 'promoting' homosexuality. They note however, that similar resistance and resentment occurred when issues of racism were being addressed in the 1970s. The response of the school, they suggest, should be to emphasise their ethical and professional duty of catering to the needs of all students, regardless of, among other things, their sexual orientation. They then outline suggested Guidelines by which this duty can be put into effect including awareness raising within the wider school community, in-service training for teachers and counsellors and support for families. They also put forward practical suggestions for addressing anti-gay prejudice within the school curriculum through subject areas such as literature, social studies, history etc.

During the course of this research contact was also made with a number of community based initiatives seeking to promote equality for lesbians and gay men at school. Interesting projects in this respect included the following:

- The **Hetrick-Martin Institute** is a New York based social service and advocacy organisation dedicated to meeting the diverse needs of gay and lesbian youth and to educating society about their lives. In 1985 the Institute, with the New York City Board of Education, opened the Harvey Milk School for youth that are not able to complete their education in mainstream education due to anti-gay harassment. The school also runs an after-school drop-in centre, provides

individual and family counselling, practical support for homeless youth and advocacy at national level.

- The **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)** is a New York based organisation working at national level in the United States. GLSEN "seeks to develop school climate where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes in creating a more vibrant and diverse community". Its advocacy role includes developing linkages with mainstream education organisations, teacher unions and government. It supports the work of local 'Chapters' and provides a range of resources including videos, books, guidelines and a web site (http//www.glsen.org).

3. IRELAND: GENERAL POLICY AND DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT

3.1 KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

The policy context for gay and lesbian initiatives has improved significantly in recent years. The Combat Poverty Agency report and recommendations are beginning to have an impact. Sexual orientation is explicitly included in the Employment Equality Act (1998) and in the forthcoming Equal Status legislation, which addresses discrimination in the context of service provision. The Equal Status Bill will have particular relevance to education in that it provides specific protections against harassment in schools, including harassment that might arise on the basis of a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation.

The Equality Authority is now established as a statutory body under this legislation to promote equality. The Authority has recently established an Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals, which is developing recommendations in a range of areas including education. The committee includes representatives of the Departments of Education and Science and Health and Children, representatives of the gay and lesbian community throughout Ireland and employers and trade union representatives. Under the new National Agreement, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, the recommendations of the Advisory Committee will be considered by the social partners.

The Treaty of Amsterdam also contains a new anti-discrimination clause which explicitly includes sexual orientation (it is notable that the Irish government was largely responsible for ensuring that this anti-discrimination clause was included and that sexual orientation was not overlooked).

The report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) recommended "the inclusion of a module on homophobia (prejudice and hatred of lesbians and gay men) in the proposed sex and relationship course in second level schools" (1993:176). The report also included a section on education with detailed recommendations to promote and monitor a gender equity policy.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) report **Sharing in Progress** (Government of Ireland, 1997: 71-72), which dealt with issues of discrimination and inequality, recorded that evidence has been documented on discrimination leading to poverty for a number of groups and referred to Travellers (*Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*) and lesbians and gay men (Combat Poverty Agency, 1995). It also referred to the "ongoing debate on the extent to which discrimination can increase the risk of poverty for some groups in society". It stated that:

> "While homosexuality in itself does not necessarily place one at risk of poverty, the impact, experience and perception of discrimination may limit the full participation of gay men and lesbians in society, and may in some cases place them at risk of poverty"

Reflecting this concern, the Poverty/Equality Proofing Guidelines of NAPS published in 1998 explicitly included sexual orientation. These Guidelines apply to all civil service departments and involve 'poverty proofing' in a number of circumstances including the design of policies and preparation of Memoranda to Government on significant policy proposals.

The National Economic and Social Council (NESF) report, **Equality Proofing Issues** (1996) also specifically included gay men and lesbians although admitting that that its particular focus was on women, people with disabilities and Travellers. The report stated that the approach of the *Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment* (PAFT) procedure, which has been in operation in Northern Ireland since 1994 and which includes sexual orientation, could be a model in the south. The report recommended that equality objectives should focus on, *inter alia*,

> "Respecting diversity rather than promoting homogeneity, and facilitating the creation of new relations between different communities" (NESF,1996:37)

The report also recommended that equality proofing procedures should apply to the voluntary and community sectors. More recently, in its **report *Partnership 2000: Developing the Equality Provisions***, the NESF recommended the establishment of a task force on discrimination against gay men and lesbians (NESF, 1998).

The Department of Social Welfare Green Paper on the community and voluntary sector, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, recognised the role of organisations representing the lesbian and gay communities and, most importantly, it stated that networks concerned with gay and lesbian issues could be eligible for funding under the category of National Anti-Poverty Networks (1997:63). The Department of Health and Children has produced a number of policy documents, which stress issues of equity, strengthening community action, prioritising vulnerable groups, and promoting safer sexual practices. (Department of Health, 1994,1995 and GLEN/Nexus, 1996). Another significant development in public policy is the Ombudsman's guide to standards of best practice for public servants which includes sexual orientation and other categories in an anti-bias clause.

3.2   GAY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

> "The first most obvious point to emphasise is that we are talking about a community – one that has organised its own resources to meet the most immediate and pressing needs imaginable in what is often a hostile environment devoid of effective external support" (GLEN/Nexus, 1996:67).

There is a long-established tradition of gay/lesbian community development and voluntary service provision in Ireland since the first groups were set up in 1974[3]. Gay Switchboard Dublin has been operating continuously since mid-1970s and is now one of the leading service providers to the gay community. The Gay Switchboard Dublin telephone line operates seven days a week, and it also supports a range of other services such as a gay youth group, a group for parents of lesbians and gay men (Parents Support) and a befriending group for those who are 'coming out' (Icebreakers).

Another major community resource is Gay Community News, a free monthly newspaper published by the National Lesbian and Gay Federation.

Lesbian Education and Awareness (LEA) is funded under the EU New Opportunities for Women programme and provides a range of training services and publications.

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3 .   For a detailed documentation and discussion of these issues see `Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland' by Kieran Rose (Cork University Press, 1994) and `Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland', a collection of articles edited by Ide O'Caroll and Eoin Collins (1996).

The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) has campaigned successfully for a range of equality legislation and initiatives. It had a pivotal role in the development of the concept of broad-ranging equal status legislation which would include a range of grounds including sexual orientation, gender, disability, membership of the Travelling community, age, race and ethnicity [4].

There are also a range of community services provided in towns such as Cork, Derry, Limerick, Galway, Dundalk, Waterford and other centres. Other services in Dublin include Outhouse, a community centre and the Gay Men's Health Project which is part of the Eastern Regional Health Authority.

Recently there has been a burgeoning of gay/lesbian cultural activity with events such as film festivals, art/photographic exhibitions, a choir and a forthcoming RTE documentary on gay/lesbian history in Ireland. "Sex, Nation and Dissent" edited by Eibhear Walshe is a collection of articles on various aspects of literature by and about lesbians and gay men in Ireland. There are a number of high profile lesbian and gay writers such as Emma Donoghue, Mary Dorcey and Cathal O'Searcaigh.

Until recently most gay organisations received no outside funding and so their developmental possibilities were limited. Gay HIV Strategies is a good example of a new trend of better links between the gay community and the state sector. Gay HIV Strategies is core-funded by the Department of Health and Children. Based on the needs and strategy study, *HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community* (GLEN/Nexus, 1996), its role is to develop partnerships between the gay community sector, the state sector and other agencies in order to provide a supportive context for health promotion and HIV prevention work. Productive initiatives it has instigated include :

- A partnership process between the Eastern Health Board and all the major gay community service providers was initiated in 1998. The process involved all the gay community service providers and provided for funding for a range of pilot projects and initiatives including the printing of the Parents Support booklet,[5] a needs and strategy analysis of OutYouth (a gay youth group based in Dublin)[6], technical assistance for the enhancement of HIV/AIDS coverage in Gay Community News, support for Gay Switchboard Dublin and support for OutHouse, the Dublin gay community centre.

- A joint project with the National Social Service Board (NSSB) which resulted in the distribution of a gay and lesbian information package to more than 500 information outlets serviced by the NSSB.

- A range of initiatives for gay youth including a needs and strategy project for OutYouth, (mentioned above), the development of a model curriculum for the training of youth workers on gay youth issues (forthcoming), a conference on gay/lesbian youth issues organised with the National Youth Federation, information distribution by the Youth Information Resource Unit (Department of

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4 .   According to Niamh Breathnach, then Labour Party spokesperson on equality issues, it was proposals made by GLEN that led to the Labour Party's Equal Status Private Members Bill being broadened out to include a wide range of groups vulnerable to discrimination. This inclusive approach was later adopted in subsequent Government legislation relating to employment equality and equal status.

5 .   The booklet, entitled *If Your Child is Gay or Lesbian* provides support to parents of gay children in a questions and answers format.

6 .   A report of this project was published in 1998 . It provides very useful information on some of the issue affecting gay youth.

Education and Science), and initiatives by the City of Dublin Youth Services Board and the Waterford Regional Youth Services.

- A project funded by the Waterford Area Partnership to build the capacity of the local gay community and develop linkages with state and other agencies (report available).

- A significant Garda programme to combat violence against gay people to be developed in consultation with the gay community.

A detailed evaluation of the Gay HIV Strategies programme is currently being carried out and this should provide a valuable strategic framework for future initiatives.

4. EDUCATION SYSTEM

4.1 OVERALL POLICY CONTEXT

The structure, control and ownership of schools in Ireland has been the subject of considerable debate over the past decades and is an issue that continues to have important implications in terms of promoting greater understanding around sexuality. However, it is not the intention of this study to explore the implications of this issue, but rather to concentrate on the opportunities that have been presented by the changing educational policy environment for promoting a safe and supportive school environment for young lesbian and gay students.

Particularly significant policy changes in this respect include the greater emphasis placed on the principle of equality and on the tackling of educational disadvantage. According to the White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* (1995) "Where participation and achievement in the education system are impeded by physical, economic or social factors, the State should seek to eliminate or compensate for the sources and consequences of educational disadvantage" (1995:6). The education system, it states "should have a philosophy that embraces all students, female and male, on the basis of equality". Measures to promote equality will include "allocating resources to those in greatest need, providing appropriate support systems, and changing the tangible and intangible qualities of the system itself to cater for the diverse educational needs and interests of the population" (1995: 7).

The principle of equality has also been an important feature of the Education Act (1998). One of key objectives of the Act is to "promote equality of access to and participation in education and to promote the means whereby students may benefit from education" (Section 6(c)). In line with this objective, recognised schools should, according to the Act, "ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs are identified and provided for" (S.9(a)). Schools should also ensure "…that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices" (S.9(c)). The Act goes on to require school boards of management to make arrangements for a 'school plan' stating the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to, and participation in, the school and the measures which the school proposes for the achievement of these objectives (S21(2)).

The Education Act provides for the Minister to set up a committee to advise him/her on policies and strategies to combat educational disadvantage. For the purposes of the Act, educational disadvantage is defined as:

> "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools" ((S32(9)).

The 1998 Act also sets out the precise functions of the Department's Inspectorate which could have important potential in terms of meeting the needs of gay students. For example, an Inspector may "conduct assessments of the educational needs of students in recognised schools and advise those students, their parents and the schools as appropriate in relation to the educational development of those students" (S.(13)(3)(a)(ii)). Another function of the Inspectorate is to "evaluate the quality and

effectiveness of the provision of education in the State, including comparison with relevant international practice and standards and to report thereon to the Minister" (S.(13)(3)(b). The Inspector will also disseminate information relating to, *inter alia*, "successful educational initiatives which have been implemented by schools and centres for education"(S 13 (3)(e)(ii).

Another significant policy development over the past ten years has been the increased emphasis on partnership and consultation, both in the formulation of policy nationally as well as in the implementation of measures at school level. The White Paper *Charting our Education Future* puts forward 'Partnership', along with 'Equality' and 'Pluralism' as some of the key 'educational principles'. An important point raised by the White Paper under the heading of partnership, and subsequently re-affirmed in the Department of Education and Science 'Statement of Strategy' is that the "learner is at the centre of the education process". The other principal participants, collectively referred to as the 'partners in education' include parents/ patrons/trustees/owners/governors, management bodies, teachers, the local community and the State. "Effective partnership", according to the White Paper,

> "involves active co-operation among those directly involved in the provision of education and the anchoring of educational institutions and the structures in the wider community they serve" (1995:7).

The Education Act (1998) reflects this increased emphasis on consultation and partnership in both the formulation and implementation of education policy. For example, in addition to provisions for consultation with education partners on developing policy around curriculum and educational disadvantage, the Act also provides for the Minister to make regulations for the liaison between schools and other statutory interests (such as Health Boards) and "voluntary and other bodies which have a special interest in education, in particular, education of students with special educational needs" (S33(j)(iv)).

A significant development in terms of the operation of partnership at school level has been provision for the involvement of parents. The Education Act specifies a range of new statutory rights for parents in relation to the school. These include the right of parents to: establish parents associations in schools; participate in boards of management and; be involved in the preparation of the school plan. The Act also provides for consultation with parents in relation to the assessment of the psychological needs of their children and the right to appeal to the Board of Management against a decision of a teacher or a member of staff of the school and to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science against certain actions taken by the Board of Management.

4.2   KEY CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENTS

A range of new educational programmes and developments in the curriculum have been developed over the past few years that have considerable potential for addressing the problems faced by gay people in education, as well as for addressing anti-gay prejudice more generally. These initiatives reflect the policy changes that have taken place within the education system (for example greater focus on equality and addressing educational disadvantage) as outlined above, but also changes in the wider policy environment. Important with respect to the latter, has been an increased openness and understanding around sexuality, concern for the protection of children and more general measures to promote equality and address disadvantage.

With regard to sex education, an important and timely initiative has been Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and the wider Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) of which RSE is a part. Both place considerable emphasis on building young people's self esteem, informed by key principles such as 'fair play', respect and tolerance. RSE is also one of the first programmes to have specifically dealt with sexual orientation in a positive way. Development themes covered by RSE at post primary level under the heading of 'human sexuality' include 'information on and sensitivity to sexual orientation' and 'awareness of discrimination'. Also important has been the *Exploring Masculinities* Programme, which has been implemented on a pilot basis in a number of single sex boys schools. The programme includes specific provision for addressing negative stereotypes of homosexuality.

While these programmes are to be welcomed insofar as they directly address the issue of sexual orientation, other important initiatives have been developed which hold out considerable, as yet unrealised, potential for meeting the needs of gay people. Civic, Social and Political Education focuses on citizenship based on human rights. This programme has encouraged students to engage in action projects to increase their understanding of issues including discrimination faced by marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, Travellers and refugees.

In 1993, the Department issued *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools* . The Guidelines aim to assist schools in preventing and dealing with bullying behaviour and to raise awareness of such behaviour in the 'school community' as a whole, including school management, teachers, pupils, parents and those from the local community who interface with the school. Forms of bullying mentioned in the guidelines include name calling and 'slagging' which can take the form of "sexual remarks about a pupil's sexual orientation.

Also important has been the increased focus on tackling educational disadvantage. This has included innovative projects to involve a wider set of statutory and community stakeholders in addressing issues such as early school leaving, poor health, low attainment and poor self esteem. Such approaches are especially relevant to the issue of sexual orientation given the range of issues likely to affect a young gay person. These, as set out in the Combat Poverty Agency report, include difficulties experienced at home, bullying or harassment outside of school and health problems, including incidence or risk of HIV infection (GLEN/Nexus, 1995).

5. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO LESBIAN AND GAY STUDENTS

As outlined in the previous section, a number of programmes and curricula have been developed which have considerable potential for addressing the needs of gay people in education. The following section outlines some of these key services and programmes in more detail.

5.1 SOCIAL AND PERSONAL HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has (at the time of writing this report) been finalising a syllabus for Social, Personal and Health Education for the Primary School Curriculum and for the Junior Cycle Curriculum at post-primary level. It will have a number of learning objectives, which include the concepts, knowledge, and personal skills that will enable young people to make safe and healthy choices, now and throughout their lives. A number of the more specific aims set out for SPHE have considerable relevance in terms of meeting the needs of lesbian and gay students. These include the following:

- To foster the social development of the child and enable him/her to care for and respect other people;

- To establish a framework of attitudes and values about oneself and others within a moral and spiritual context;

- To enable the child to respect human and cultural diversity and appreciate and understand the interdependent nature of the world;

- To enable the child to become aware of some of the individual and community rights and responsibilities that come from living in a democracy;

- To enable the child to appreciate and respect the diversity that exists in society and the positive contributions of the various ethnic, cultural, religious and social groups.

An important element linking the various aims and objectives set out in the programme is the promotion of positive self-identity and self-esteem in each pupil. A range of programmes already being implemented in schools will come under the remit of SPHE. These include: the Stay Safe Programme; the Substance Abuse Prevention Programme (SAPP); the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme at primary level, and Relationships and Sexuality Education which has been implemented in schools over the past three years.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), was designed to be an integral part of the wider SPHE but was implemented somewhat earlier. It is particularly relevant to lesbian and gay students in that it is the only major school programme that specifically addresses the issue of sexual orientation. The Programme started with the publication of a policy pack on RSE by the Department of Education for use by the schools in preparing their policy in this area. An information booklet for parents was also made available to all parents throughout the country. This documentation emphasised the involvement of the entire school community including parents,

teachers and school management to produce an RSE policy statement for the school.

The Guidelines issued by the Department for RSE for primary schools states one of the broad objectives of the programme is to enable the child "to become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change and understand that their developing sexuality is an important aspect of self-identity" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1996). The Guidelines for Post–Primary Schools build on this objective and provide for the development of specific themes around human sexuality, particularly at Senior Cycle. Themes under the heading of human sexuality include 'awareness and understanding of sexual orientations", "exploration of some of the issues pertaining to equality" and "exploration of the range of attitudes, values and beliefs regarding sexual behaviour in modern society" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1996).

ISSUES EMERGING FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF SPHE

The development of SPHE can be viewed to some extent as having been a bottom-up process, with many schools, in addition to implementing programmes such as RSE and SAPP, having already undertaken work on health-orientated education for some years. This experience has, according to key personnel interviewed in the course of this research, been important in informing the development of the Programme. A useful report on this experience is contained in the report **SPHE in Post Primary Schools in the Eastern Health Board** (1999) undertaken by the Eastern Health Board Health Promotion Department. The report is based on a consultation process (including a survey questionnaire) undertaken with principals and teachers in post primary schools in the Eastern Health Board region.

One of the student health issues identified by teachers in the research was sexual orientation. Questions raised in relation to this issue included concerns around delivering teaching at an appropriate age and the need for best practice for developing a positive and supportive school, class and curriculum approach (1999: 30). Also raised were concerns that the "suggestion of teaching on this issue occurring in Senior Cycle did not fit with research which indicates that sexual identity is forming at ages 12 –13" (1999:30).

The report also looked at some of the factors that facilitated and constrained the implementation of SPHE type programmes in the schools. In this respect, the report notes the almost unanimous feeling among teachers that the school principal must be committed to SPHE for it to succeed and that "the central importance of health needs to be imbedded within the school ethos and the curriculum" (1999:14). An issue raised by teachers was the 'lack of comfort' which many of their colleagues felt about teaching SPHE and in particular, about teaching the Relationships and Sexuality Education course. These difficulties it is stated, tended to be compounded by negative coverage of RSE from some quarters of the media.

In terms of supporting teachers in teaching or facilitating SPHE, it was felt that a school policy on SPHE was a "source of protection for teachers, providing them with a framework for their teaching and a 'back-up' of shared responsibility with the whole staff team and school management" (1999:21). Such a policy helped alleviate fears teachers often have around negative reactions of some parents to aspects of health courses. Teachers also felt that such reactions could be pre-empted by good information about what the school includes in its health courses and an open-door policy, which welcomed parents into the school to discuss and view materials. In this regard, the report also documents the creativity of some schools in their inclusion of

parents in their children's health education and the broader life of the school. Examples cited, which are outlined here in detail given their relevance to approaching the issue of sexual orientation, include:

- Sending clear information home to parents about what health topics are being covered, how and where;
- Health education programmes for parents (schools have run programmes on women's health, drugs awareness, assertiveness, parenting). These programmes, it is stated, are an opportunity to link the school with community groups in their locality who may be offering health courses;
- Health education literature for parents;
- Health events tailored to parents and inviting parents to school health events such as Drug Awareness Week, sports days, health eating events etc.
- Using existing parent time, for example parent evenings, to share information about health;
- Working through the Home Liaison Service and Remedial Teacher;
- Invitations extended to parents when there are guest speakers (1999:22).

Teachers stated that they would like to hear about other successful initiatives with parents. Many also expressed a strong interest in initiating links with community organisations and services, but were concerned that they did not have sufficient time 'to source them' (1999:23).

5.2 CIVIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION (CSPE)

Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) became part of the core (mandatory) Junior Certificate Core Curriculum in all post-primary schools in 1997. It is a course in citizenship based on human rights and social responsibilities and aims to develop active citizens with: a sense of belonging; a capacity to gain access to information and structures relating to the society in which they live and; an ability and confidence to participate in democratic society (CSPE Support Service,1998).

The objectives for the development of attitudes and values in the Programme include:

- A commitment to the values of human rights, social responsibilities and democracy;
- An appreciation of and respect for differing viewpoints, ideas and cultures and an ability to empathise with the situation of other individuals and groups;
- Awareness of and respect for the rights and responsibilities of all individuals and groups;
- A commitment to oppose prejudice, discrimination and social injustice at all levels of society.

CSPE has a more general and less prescribed curriculum than is the case with other subjects (including SPHE). There is an emphasis in the programme on active learning methodologies, with students encouraged to develop and undertake their own 'action projects' on an issue or topic of national or local interest that might involve research or inviting a guest speaker into the school.

A key difference between CSPE and Social Personal and Health Education is that the CSPE focuses on the civic or political context of an issue. This, according to key personnel interviewed in the course of this research, has implications for how topics such as sexual orientation or health issues such as HIV/AIDS might be approached in the course. For example, if HIV/AIDS were to arise within a CSPE course, the

focus would be on action projects around issues such as public reaction, political and community responses or the rights of people who are HIV positive. SPHE on the other hand would tend to focus on the specific health issues arising such as the medical implications, means of prevention and so on.

Similarly in relation to sexual orientation. If students or teachers were to approach this issue in CSPE, the focus would tend to be on the effects of discrimination in a broad sense, legal issues and reform or perhaps the role of the gay community in tackling discrimination.

5.3 'EXPLORING MASCULINITIES'

Exploring Masculinities is a new programme aimed at Transition Year and Senior Cycle boys and young men. It is being delivered to thirty single-sex boys schools. Originally developed as a Transition Year programme, it was introduced on a pilot basis in seven schools in 1997.

The Programme aims to explore different perceptions and experiences of masculinity and to promote "equality, understanding and respect for all" (Department of Education and Science, 1998). The Programme also seeks to raise awareness among boys of, among other things, relationships, health and sexuality. Included in this has been specific coverage of sexual orientation and course materials have included a video exploring the issues that affect gay men in their lives.

The issues the programme seeks to address include the apparent difficulty some men experience in discussing their emotional needs, aggressive behaviour, and, relative to women higher levels of suicide, mental illness and death and injury on the road.

5.4 POLICIES ADDRESSING BULLYING IN THE SCHOOLS

The Department of Education *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, issued to all schools in 1993, provide a potentially useful framework for addressing the forms of harassment experienced by young people (and teachers) at school if they are, or are assumed to be, lesbian or gay. The Guidelines outline various types of bullying behaviour that can be committed by pupils including physical aggression, damage to property, intimidation, name calling and 'slagging'. Interestingly, in the relation to last of these, the Guidelines state, that 'slagging' usually refers to good natured banter between people but assumes the form of bullying when it extends to very personal remarks including "suggestive remarks about a pupil's sexual orientation" (1993: 4).

With the issuance of the Guidelines every primary and post-primary school has been required to develop and implement a policy to counter bullying in co-operation with school staff and in consultation with pupils and parents. Such a policy, it is recommended, should include preventative measures as well as procedures and sanctions for dealing with actual cases of bullying behaviour.

In line with this overall approach, the school anti-bullying policy should, according to the Guidelines, have a number of key aims including:

- To create a school ethos which encourages children to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour;

- To raise awareness of bullying as a form of unacceptable behaviour with school management, teachers, pupils, parents/guardians;
- To develop procedures for noting and reporting incidents of bullying behaviour;
- To develop a programme of support for those affected by bullying behaviour and for those involved in bullying behaviour.
- To work with and through the various local agencies in countering all forms of bullying and anti-social behaviour;
- To evaluate the effectiveness of school policy on anti-bullying behaviour (1993:12).

The Guidelines emphasise the importance of anti-bullying measures in creating an environment supportive of an individuals self-esteem which is stated as "the single most influential factor in determining behaviour and indeed a greater predicator of success than intelligence" (1993: 12).

In order to create this supportive environment, and one that that meets the needs of all students, the Guidelines suggest a number of issues to take into account in meeting the aims of the anti-bullying policy. These include:

- Identifying aspects of the curriculum through which positive and lasting influences can be exerted towards forming pupils' attitudes and values. Examples suggested here include social studies, history and geography, where the interdependence of people in communities can be illustrated and the negative aspects of power highlighted. Also considered relevant are programmes such as Stay Safe, Health Promotion in schools and various other social, health and media education programmes.

- Making sure that the school takes particular care of pupils most 'at risk' of being bullied and uses its monitoring system to provide early intervention when/if necessary and responds to the needs, fears and anxieties of individual members in a sensitive manner.

- In recognition that incidents of bullying extends beyond the school, encouraging members of the wider school community (for example school bus drivers, school traffic wardens, shopkeepers etc.) to play a positive part in the anti-bullying policy of the school by reporting incidents of bullying to parents/teachers where appropriate. It may also be necessary to invite the assistance of other local persons and formal agencies such as general medical practitioners, gardai, health boards and so on.

5.5 POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

A number of measures have been undertaken over the past ten years in response to growing concerns over the extent of educational disadvantage. These have included provision for: remedial teaching; additional resources (for example, through programmes such as 'Breaking the Cycle' which focused on the primary school sector in areas of disadvantage); parental involvement and; curricula initiatives. The approach taken in many of these measures has been to pilot initiatives at the start, some of which have then been 'mainstreamed' nationally or else extended on a more limited basis to other areas.

An important aspect of policy in this area is the recognition that the complexity of educational disadvantage requires a multi-faceted response, involving not just the

education system alone, but a wider set of stakeholders. In line with this, a range of programmes and projects have been developed (including those funded under the Local Development Programme) to facilitate more integrated partnership approaches to tackling educational disadvantage. These have involved school personnel, pupils, parents, other statutory services and community/voluntary sector groups involved in wider measures to address general levels of poverty and disadvantage.

Many of these initiatives have direct relevance to meeting the needs of gay students, given the wider set of factors that can impinge on their educational performance such as problems at home and harassment and bullying experienced outside of the immediate school environment (Combat Poverty Agency,1995). The initiatives are also particularly important to those gay people identified in the Combat Poverty Agency report as already disadvantaged due to poverty.

Examples of such approaches include the following:

HOME/SCHOOL/COMMUNITY LIAISON

The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme was established in 1990 with the appointment of 30 teachers as liaison co-ordinators in 55 primary school in large designated areas of disadvantage. The scheme was subsequently extended to include a range of primary and post-primary schools in other areas of disadvantage.

The aims of the liaison scheme are :

- To maximise active participation of children in the scheme schools in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure;
- To promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of their children;
- To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills;
- To enhance the children's uptake from their education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning;
- To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

The basic unit of the scheme is at local schools level where a full-time co-ordinator serves the liaison needs of one school or of a number of schools in no more than two catchment areas. Provision is made for in-career development for co-ordinators. The Programme also has a National Co-ordinator and Assistant National Co-ordinator who advise on and support the development of the scheme, liase with participants in the scheme at local level and provide a link between local and national levels.

COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMME ON EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

The Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage is funded and co-ordinated by the Combat Poverty Agency. The Programme was initiated in 1996 and has two overall objectives:

- The establishment and support of locally-based networks whose role is to develop an integrated response to the problem of educational disadvantage within their areas and from this to provide disadvantaged children/youth with opportunities to progress and transfer between the formal and informal education

systems according to their needs, and to maximise their participation in and benefit from these systems;

- The development of structures which have the capacity to influence policy at national level drawing from the local experience.

Four networks have been supported under this programme, each including representatives of key education/youth interests in their areas, including schools, parents and training centres, the area based partnerships, youth groups, community groups and other statutory organisations. Each network developed their own action plans but have addressed a number of common themes including:

- Mapping the nature and extent of educational disadvantage in the area and identifying gaps in current provision;
- Assisting network structures and processes;
- The development of thematic working groups (e.g. on literacy);
- Awareness raising programmes on educational disadvantage;
- Structured intra-agency training programmes; and
- Support of network partners.

The programme also has a strong policy and research focus (Combat Poverty Agency, 1998).

PILOT PROGRAMME FOR 8-15 YEAR OLDS

This pilot programme was established in 1998 by the Department of Education and Science. The Programme, which has similar aims to the Combat Poverty Agency Programme on Educational Disadvantage, is testing models for the development of integrated area based co-ordination of services for young people at risk of early school leaving. It is being implemented in 14 sites around the country.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Programme for Integrated Local Development of Designated Disadvantaged and Other Areas (commonly referred to as the 'Local Development Programme') forms one part of the Operational Programme: Local Urban and Rural Development (LURD) which is part funded by European Union Structural Funds.

The main delivery mechanisms for the 'Local Development Programme' are 38 Partnership companies established in designated areas of disadvantage. One of the functions of the Partnerships is to provide additional supports to enable early school leavers to participate in education. Partnerships participate in a range of schemes such as Home/School/Community Liaison and the Pilot Programme for 8-15 Olds and have also developed their own specific measures including homework clubs, Traveller focused education projects, and literacy and numeracy education.

A small number of Local Area Partnership companies have provided some funding for the development of gay community services. Most significant in this respect, has been the work of the Waterford Area Partnership, which funded the development of a strategy report for building the capacity of the lesbian and gay community in Waterford and for the integration of the issue of gay disadvantage into the work of the Partnership. The Partnership has provided on-going funding for a 'Resource Group' for gay community development and has committed itself to addressing issues of gay disadvantage in different areas of its work, including measures to address educational disadvantage (see published strategy **report *Local Development: Lesbians and Gay Men***, Gay HIV Strategies/Nexus Research 1998).

5.6   GENDER PROGRAMMES

The Department of Education and Science has undertaken a number of actions throughout the 1990s to promote gender equality in schools. A key focus of these actions has been to break down sex stereotyping, a goal that could be usefully extended to address prejudice and discrimination against lesbians. Such provision, as stated in Section 3, would be in line with the report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women (1993) which recommended "the inclusion of a module on homophobia (prejudice and hatred of lesbians and gay men) in the proposed sex and relationship course in second level schools" (1993:176). The report also included a section on education with detailed recommendations to promote and monitor a gender equity policy.

Specific actions undertaken by the Department have included Guidelines for Teachers (1994) which were prepared in "order to assist schools towards greater awareness of equality of opportunity and towards the elimination of inequality in the day to day business of the school" (Department of Education, 1994). The Guidelines outline the effect of sex stereotyping and suggest a range of measures in response, including changes in content and delivery of curricula.

The Guidelines were issued to all primary schools in 1994 in the form of an Equality Pack that included a number of other relevant reports, particularly the Report of the Working Group on the Elimination of Sexism and Sex-Stereotyping in Texts Books and Teaching Materials in National Schools (1993), which had been drawn up under the aegis of the Second Commission on the Status of Women.

Other actions which are relevant for addressing the educational needs of lesbians (although not as yet specifically inclusive of lesbians) include the Women's Education Initiative, which is a pilot project funded under the European Social Fund. The Initiative was introduced to support projects which develop and assist women's education through addressing gaps in provision for educationally disadvantaged women, building local capacity, developing support structures, encouraging partnerships and mainstreaming learning processes.

Criteria for the allocation of funding through the Women's Education Initiative have been developed by a working group comprising representatives of the Department of Education and Science and of the voluntary and statutory agencies including Community Education Networks, Adult Education Organisations and the Combat Poverty Agency. A parallel initiative for men – the Men's Education Initiative – is currently being established.

6.   TEACHER AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES

As outlined in previous sections, programmes such as SPHE and RSE involve not just innovative course content but also methods of teaching that facilitate greater interaction between student and teacher around the issues covered. Teachers may have to deal with concerns or problems raised by individual students that they have not previously encountered, including for example, concerns that young people may have around their sexual orientation. The extent to which teachers are able to respond to these concerns will depend not just on their own skills and awareness but also on the support available from the wider school community, including teacher colleagues, guidance counsellors and support services within the education system and in the wider community in which the school operates.

A number of developments in relation to teacher training and other supports for teachers are relevant in developing a more supportive school environment in this context. These are outlined below.

6.1   TEACHER TRAINING

Pre-service training for second level teachers in Ireland typically involves completion of a primary degree at university and then follow-up with the Higher Diploma in Education. Primary school teachers complete a three year programme, leading to a Bachelor of Education degree at one of five teacher training colleges. Four of these - St. Patrick's College, Church of Ireland College, St. Mary Marino and Froebel College of Education – are based in Dublin. The last, Mary Immaculate College, is based in Limerick.

An important development in relation to pre-service training for teachers at second level has been the establishment by the Minister for Education and Science of an Expert Advisory Group to examine and make recommendations on the content, organisation and structure (including teaching practice) of programmes in teacher education for second-level teachers. The Group, according to its terms of reference, have regard to the following factors in carrying out its review:

- A comparative analysis will be made between the consecutive and concurrent models of pre-service education.
- Curricular changes at junior and senior cycle involving in particular the development of new programmes and methodologies to respond more effectively to the different and varied needs of a diverse student cohort.
- Developments in relation to catering for children with special needs.
- Developments in relation to in-school management and school development planning.
- Initiatives to address problems in relation to disadvantaged pupils.
- Developments in communications and information technology in schools.

The Group will also have regard to a number of features which should underpin the professional preparation of second-level teachers, each of which has important implications in terms of how the needs of particular groups of students, such as gay people, can be addressed. These include:

- The maintenance of balance between the personal and professional development of students, as well as between the theoretical and practical aspects of their professional preparation;

- The acquisition of the knowledge, attitudes and skills to enable student teachers develop appropriate programmes and methodologies in response to student needs;

- The development of a good understanding of adolescent development and behaviour and of issues in relation to gender equality, cultural and ethnic diversity.

6.2   EDUCATION CENTRES

As stated, important determinants of the success of programmes such as SPHE and RSE in terms of meeting the needs of gay students will be the availability of appropriate course materials and specific in-service teacher training. A particularly important resource in this respect are the Education Centres. There are currently nineteen full-time and ten part-time Education Centres based throughout the country. The functions of the Centres, as set out in the guidelines for their development (issued by the Department of Education and Science in 1998) include the following:

- To provide training, development and support for teachers and the wider school community, both in terms of meeting locally researched and identified teacher and school community needs and also through involvement in national in-service programmes;
- To be involved, as a major strategic resource within education, in a range of national and other projects and initiatives as may be decided by the Minister, following consultation and in partnership with the Centres, for implementation in the education system from time to time;
- To act as far as possible as a resource and meeting centre for the local school community;
- To plan for the development of expertise in key areas and to share such expertise throughout the Education Centre network and the educational system generally.

6.3   GUIDANCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

School Guidance Counsellors could be a very important source of assistance for lesbian and gay students, and an important back-up to teachers in courses such as RSE. Their functions include not just the provision of career advice but also the provision of advice and assistance to students in making difficult personal choices or dealing with problems that may arise for them. Guidance Counsellors should also be in a position to refer students to agencies or professionals outside the school in response to particular needs identified.

Developing a guidance counselling service that is responsive to the needs of gay students could be usefully pursued through two key organisations:

- The Institute of Guidance Counsellors, which represents practitioners in second and third level schools and colleges and;

- The National Centre for Guidance in Education, an agency of the Department of Education and Science, which supports and develops guidance provision and practice in all areas of education and informs the policy of the Department in the field of guidance.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Educational psychologists are an important resource in addressing particular psychological problems faced by students. Their services are likely to be of particular relevance to gay students, given the link between anti-gay prejudice and discrimination and the incidence of psychological distress (Combat Poverty Agency, 1995).

The main provision in this area is the service delivered by psychologists employed under the Department of Education and Science Psychological Service and those employed by the City of Dublin and County Dublin VEC's. It has been widely acknowledged however, that provision in this area has been limited. In response to this, the Minister for Education and Science established a Planning Group to prepare proposals for a National Educational Psychological Service. The Planning Group issued its report in 1998, outlining specific measures to develop an extended and more integrated service.

The Report of the Planning Group outlined specific 'socio-cultural factors' that the new service should address including the problems encountered by students with special needs such as Traveller children and the children of refugees. The needs of young gay people are not referred to in the report. However, the work to be undertaken by psychologists within the framework of the new service could, if sufficiently inclusive of the needs of all students, be particularly valuable in addressing problems faced by lesbian and gay students. Key in this respect is the support and development work of psychologists that the report states should include:

- The encouragement of collaborative systemic change in the whole school as a preventative and development strategy in relation to both learning and behaviour difficulties of groups of students;

- Contributing to the enhancement of teachers' skills in identifying and meeting student needs;

- Accessing and communicating information on research, good practice and alternative strategies;

- Contributing occasionally, and when requested, to in-career development on relevant issues,

- Engaging in research and development work such as evaluation of particular strategies or development of particular projects, related to the work of psychologists in schools (1998: 74).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a considerable body of research, both in Ireland and internationally, documenting the particular problems and difficulties faced by lesbians and gay men in school. These problems include isolation, depression, poor self-esteem, bullying, harassment and in some cases, violence and assault. These problems have had a range of educational effects including poor educational attainment and early school leaving. International research also shows an alarming incidence and risk of suicide among gay youth. It has also been shown that gay students are often reluctant to approach teachers, school counsellors and other professionals for help in dealing with the problems they face. It could be said that the education system has failed to provide lesbian and gay students with a safe and supportive learning environment – a situation which denies them equal educational opportunities. As well as increasing the risk of educational disadvantage for all gay students, lack of appropriate provision for addressing these problems compounds the difficulties faced by those gay students who are already educationally disadvantaged due to poverty.

From interviews carried out with key personnel in the education sector in the course of this research, it is clear that there is a growing recognition of the particular problems faced by lesbian and gay students in education and the need for the educational system to develop appropriate and effective service responses. Arising from changes in the education system, there is now a considerable opportunity to develop such responses. These changes include an increased focus on the needs of the student and a greater emphasis on addressing issues of equality and discrimination and tackling educational disadvantage. Also important has been a greater recognition of the diversity of educational needs, for example, with respect to gender, socio-economic status and ethnic background (such as membership of the Traveller Community), and the need for appropriate and targeted responses.

There has been a range of important new programmes and pilot initiatives, including new curricula, designed to make the educational system more responsive to a range of student needs. Examples include: Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), Social Personal and Health Education (of which RSE is a part), Civic, Social and Political Education, 'Breaking the Cycle' and other special programmes to combat disadvantage such as the 'Pilot Programme for 8-15 Year Olds' and the Combat Poverty Agency Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage. Also important have been measures to provide for a safer school environment through the development of anti-bullying policies.

Another significant development has been the increased emphasis on partnership, both in education policy formulation and in the implementation of services. This development has included a recognition of the role of a wide range of partners in the education system, including students, parents, teachers, and other statutory and community/voluntary interests. Examples of this new approach include the provision for participation of parents on school boards, involvement of community groups in programmes tackling educational disadvantage, and the role played by agencies such as Trocaire and the Combat Poverty Agency in the development of modules on human rights in the CSPE.

There has also been very significant development in relation to equality for gay people. Perhaps most important in this respect are the Employment Equality Act (1998) and the Equal Status Bill (forthcoming), both of which prohibit discrimination

on the basis of sexual orientation. As referred to earlier, the Equality Authority set up under this equality legislation have established an Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals, whose recommendations will be considered by the social partners under the Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness.

Other significant developments are the National Anti-Poverty Strategy 'Poverty/Equality Proofing Guidelines' which include lesbians and gay men, various reports and recommendations of the National Economic and Social Forum, and policy/programmes developed by particular Departments and agencies, including for example, the Gardai. Another notable development has been the partnership established between the gay community and the Department of Health and Children with core funding for a strategy project, Gay HIV Strategies. Also important has been the establishment of Lesbian Education and Awareness, funded under the EU New Opportunities for Women programme.

7.1   RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from this preliminary research that there is an urgent requirement to respond to the educational needs of gay and lesbian students. It is also clear that the many new approaches and initiatives in education and related areas provide great opportunities for promoting a safer and more supportive school environment for gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Realising these opportunities will require:

- A serious commitment by relevant agencies within the context of an overall strategy,

- The provision of resources for the necessary work to be carried out; and

- openness to working in partnership with the gay/lesbian community.

The Department of Education and Science is the central agency in terms of its statutory powers and resources and it is recommended that it should take the lead role in promoting and funding a national strategy to promote equal opportunities for lesbians and gay men in education. This Strategy should be based on a partnership with all relevant agencies and the gay community. A Working Party should be established with representation from the relevant sectors and with sufficient staff and resources in order to develop, implement and monitor such a strategy. The elements and agencies relevant to such a strategy are outlined in the main body of this report. The importance and effectiveness of partnership approaches of this kind have also been emphasised in Department of Education and Science policy.

While the Department of Education and Science has the central role, there is a wide range of agencies (again outlined in the main body of the report) who have a responsibility to ensure that lesbian and gay students are included and provided for in all policies and programmes relevant to their needs. They should take immediate steps to respond to this client-group. In relation to health, the Department of Health and Children and the Health Boards have a key role to play in the development of health promotion in schools.

As an immediate step to speedily move this process on, it is recommended that funding be provided for a Project Director whose responsibility would be to engage with the range of agencies and initiatives, to develop joint pilot/demonstration projects and to contribute to policy development. In particular the role of the Project Director would include:

- Identifying and supporting 'best practice' initiatives in schools to address problems faced by gay students and promoting and mainstreaming such approaches at national level;

- Identifying key support requirements for teachers in meeting the needs of gay students and promoting the delivery of such support through pre-service and in-service training, Education Centres and relevant national structures such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment;

- Identifying the particular needs of gay students who are already disadvantaged and developing responses to such needs through existing programmes to address educational disadvantage.

A separate fund should be set-aside so that there would be the possibility of co-funding of pilot/demonstration projects. It is strongly recommended that an evaluative framework be put in place at the start. A Consultative Group with appropriate expertise could be established to support and oversee such an initiative; the Project Director would present regular progress reports to this group.

The effectiveness of such a strategic partnership approach in developing joint initiatives and contributing to policy at a national level has already been demonstrated by Gay HIV Strategies (core funded by the Department of Health and Children) on which an evaluation report is currently being finalised.

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APPENDIX: ORGANISATIONS AND RESOURCES

Organisations

The following lists some resources and supports available for Lesbians and Gay Men in Ireland.

Organisation	Services
Gay HIV Strategies (01) 473 0599 ghs@nexus.ie	Facilitates linkages between statutory, voluntary and commercial groups to promote gay and lesbian community development and HIV prevention initiatives.
Gay Switchboard Dublin (01) 872 1055 gsd@iol.ie	Run a daily telephone helpline for anyone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or who has issues around their sexual identity; their families or friends. Provides confidential listening and support services for those with any issues around being lesbian or gay – relationships, family problems, health and safer sex advice, legal issues etc. Runs a youth group, Coming-Out group, Married Mens Group and a Spouses Support Group.
Gay Community News (01) 671 0939 gcn@eircom.net	This is a free monthly Lesbian and Gay newspaper, available at a number of locations throughout the country. Contact Gay Community News for list of distribution points. The back pages give a comprehensive list of both social and help organisations around the country.
The Equality Authority Clonmel Street Dublin 2 (01) 4173333	
The Other Place 8 Sth Main St. Cork (021) 278 470	Café, Drop-In and Gay Men's Health project in Cork.
Lesbian Education and Awareness (LEA/NOW) and Lesbians Organising Together (LOT) (01) 872 0460	Develops and promotes Lesbian issues and community development throughout the country.

Organisation	Services
OutHouse 6 Sth. William St. Dublin 2 (01) 670 6377	Lesbian and Gay Community Centre. Provides café, meeting rooms etc. in Dublin. Venue for some of the many social and activity based groups in the Dublin area.
Parents Support (01) 872 1055 gsd@iol.ie	Parents Support is a group of parents of lesbian and gay children who provide support and operate a phone based helpline for other parents. They also publish the free booklet: *If Your Child is Lesbian or Gay.* They can be contacted through Gay Switchboard Dublin.
Lesbian Line Dublin (01) 872 9911	Weekly helpline for Lesbians. Operates on a Thursday night. They also run befriending groups for lesbians and bisexual women.
Galway Limerick Sligo/Roscommon Midlands Waterford Drogheda Dundalk Derry Belfast Wexford Tralee	There are various help and social groups in all of these areas. For full details, contact Gay Switchboard Dublin as above, or see the back pages of Gay Community News.
National Social Services Board and the Citizens Information Centres	The National Social Service Board (NSSB) funded the development and distribution of a package of information with regard to gay/lesbian issues including health and HIV/AIDS. This information is available at all CICs.