

Bournemouth University Sports Faculty Report findings review by project client:

Some observations by Bournemouth University Sports Faculty, 'Homophobia and Sport' project, client, Alan Mercel-Sanca, on some of the findings detailed in the project report, and related substantive issues:

The ethos of sport – the cultivation and development of personal excellence, skill and technique in a given field – is one of the finest accomplishments of human civilisation, from the earliest of times to the present. The very spirit of the original Olympics, and the modern age Olympic Games, which ultimately inform all professional and amateur sports, stems from two sources: the pursuit of sporting excellence purely for its own sake, and from a unifying of the whole of humankind through the medium of sport of a 'One World, One Humanity' perspective.

The '*Homophobia in Sport – What's the Score?*' Bournemouth University Sports Faculty student team report and suggested guidelines for effecting badly needed change, underline that the ethos of sport and of the Olympics are in 2013 non-existent in many UK sports contexts, and almost universally in schools in the UK, as regards the blight of homophobia.

Up to this point in time, for example, UK Premier League football clubs (which are multi-million pound businesses) and state-funded schools, have, it is commonly found and perceived, responded minimally or at best at a tokenistic level to their social and ethical responsibilities for compliance with the 'spirit' and also the 'letter' of the 2010 Equality Act. This, in regard to putting into actual practice their legal requirements under the Act, and related meaningful action concerning taking substantial non-tokenistic action against discrimination experienced by LGBT / non-heterosexual sportspersons, fans and school pupils, by fellow non-LGBT sportspersons, fans and school pupils.

Very considerable amounts of money are dedicated by sports National Governing Bodies [NGB's], such as the English Football Association [FA], and other key national level organisations such as the Department for Education, Sport England, to work to counteract all forms of discrimination, doing so under their required legal commitments to undertake such action through the Equality Act. These NGB's and government departments work closely with a range of LGBT equality and anti-discrimination campaigning, educational and support organisations. However, to date in certain areas minimal change has been effected to support those suffering from the illegal and severely harmful effects of this socially and psychologically destructive phenomenon.

The Bournemouth University Sports Faculty 'Homophobia in Sport' project was undertaken to provide a meaningful and objective 'weather check' on where the nation stands at present on the urgent and serious issue of homophobia and LGBT prejudice and bullying/discrimination, in both sports and schools real life day-to-day contexts, via a local [Dorset and South Coast area] and national level two-week 'mystery shopper' type 'state of the nation' snap shot research project.

The university research project comprised two main elements:

a) a snapshot survey conducted via two questionnaires and a focus group

b) the creation of a set of advised guidelines to effect tangible change in regard to the issues and challenges identified concerning the phenomena of homophobia and discrimination against LGBT people and related prejudice.

A further important supplementary aspect of the project involved the university team providing their personal reflections [detailed in an appendix to the report] on the issues covered and the invaluable experience that the team's members gained through making and seeking communications in support of the project's work, with a wide range of individuals and [non-LGBT and LGBT] relevant organisations at local and national levels. At the time of the presentation of the report at the university, the student team particularly commented on how they commonly met with evasive and uncooperative communications tactics by those that were clearly uncomfortable, not so much with the issues covered, but with the way their own approaches to tackling these ranged from the tokenistic to the clearly lax/disinterested.

A particularly important conclusion team members reached was that almost universally in sports and school contexts, highly proactive approaches existed towards condemnation and reporting of racism or prejudice against those with disabilities, but that these demonstrated the scale of lack of seriousness in confronting homophobic 'banter' and related behaviour.

The team, through their researches and engagement with those who contributed information to the project, further noted in particular that whilst the *Kick it Out* organisation has a household name for fighting racism in sport, it was virtually unknown that it worked to challenge homophobia in sport: the notional figure of KIO having a 95% identification with combatting racism, and a 5% identification with combatting homophobia was expressed by the team to myself and the programme leader and associate dean of the university sports faculty at the presentation.

Almost one year ago, when the thematic articles material that formed the basis of the 'Time for Change – Now!' Olympics legacy anti-homophobia exhibition project was being finalised – a particular point was noted. This concerned the ever growing gap between those non-LGBT sports fans who are overtly homophobic and those fans who oppose and seek to disassociate from homophobic 'banter' language and related forms of behaviour, as highlighted by Brighton and Hove Albion supporters submitting a formal complaint to the FA [noted on BBC news on 1st April: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21992569>].

This trend by non-LGBT football fans who are increasingly running out of patience with the degree of de facto toleration/protection for homophobic prejudice in football, indicates the inability of national governing bodies such as the FA and many football clubs to tackle anti-social behaviour in any meaningful way. An honourable exception to this poor record by NGB's, was provided by the fullest praise for the value of the initiative by the Equality lead officer of Manchester FA.

It is to be hoped that the findings of the 'Homophobia in Sport – What's the Score?' report will contribute to further expand debate about developing new and more serious/effective grassroots level ways to counteract homophobia in sport and schools.

At the presentation at Bournemouth University of the draft report, it was disturbing to learn of the record of minimal to non-existent support provided to the university project team members by

schools in the main geographical area covered (Dorset), despite local authority anti-bullying officers enthusiastic endeavours to alert numbers of schools to the benefits of supporting the project team members research. One honourable exception to this very concerning lack of interest to support the cause of combatting homophobia in secondary school contexts, was provided by Poole High School: although unable to support directly, due to the lateness of being contacted before the research project questionnaire deadline, the school at senior officer level emailed to commend the value of the initiative.

The particular unique and invaluable strengths (in comparison to other larger funded ones conducted by national organisations [LGBT and non-LGBT]) of this -- admittedly small sample size -- questionnaire survey-based report were:

a) The findings of the project's report and related suggested action-point guidelines correspond very accurately to the actual experience of discrimination against LGBT people in certain sports [from fan to professional/amateur sportsperson levels].

b) The university sports faculty team students that created the report were unremunerated; they were therefore not influenced by related considerations. Comparisons can be made with national organisations working in the field of sports that have equality and diversity remits, and that produce survey's on a much larger scale, which provide results that either completely deny or skirt around the very well-known problem of anti-LGBT discrimination in many sports).

c) All of the project team members had at the commencement of the project no, or minimal, awareness of the phenomena of LGBT related prejudice, and in particular no awareness of homophobia in sports and schools contexts. As can be seen in the appendix, that details the team's members experiences of working on the project, substantial changed perspectives about homophobia, its negative consequences, and the reasons why so little urgently needed change has not been able to take place in sports and schools contexts.

d) The phraseology of the questions on both project survey questionnaires was provided through the direct technical guidance to the university student team with a view to maximising responses of an accurate rather than 'tick box' / evasive kind. It was as a result of the careful phrasing – a substantial part of which was due to the kind and expert guidance provided by Lindsay England -- of the questions, that such valuable data and very honest/true to life responses were produced, informing the quality and credibility of the report findings and proposed guidelines.

Final thoughts regarding the report findings:

To effect change 'Gate-Keepers' that obstruct change need to be identified and their actions/inactions publicly highlighted to remove the obstacle they pose to removing homophobia from the schools and sporting life of the nation

For anyone reading the university sports faculty student team report, in addition to noting some very hard and challenging statistics and related quotes from project participants, it will be abundantly clear that the main challenge to removing homophobia as what appears to be virtually a

national way of life in many sports, and almost universally in schools, is the existence of 'gate keeping.'

The report -- and comparable important work (that of the Stonewall organisation and for example some trades unions that are especially dedicated and active in the support of LGBT equality and human rights) -- indicates that there are two types of 'gate keepers' that prevent meaningful change taking place at the key and all-important grass roots level. These comprise those who:

- a)** Connive at homophobic prejudice and those who practice it on for example football terraces or in school PE and classroom contexts
- b)** Have perceived vested interests in not wishing to undertake their responsibilities in the field of LGBT equality and anti-discrimination requirements

Alan Mercel-Sanca. April 15th 2013



Time for Change – NOW!

Anti-homophobia Olympics Legacy Exhibition Project