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in ITE

ACET Equalities Sub-Group Members

# Terminology and rationale

- TGD (Trans and Gender Diverse)
- TNB (Trans and Non-Binary)
- PESSD (Physical Education, School Sport and Dance)

The few studies that offer insights into the experiences of trans+ youth, suggest that many issues are intensified in the PESSD area of the school curriculum (Drury S. , et al, 2017)

DfE Non-statutory guidance for schools & colleges in England Dec 2023, Draft for consultation does not use the term transgender, choosing 'Gender Questioning' instead.

[Gender Questioning Children - non-statutory guidance \(education.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gender-questioning-children-non-statutory-guidance)

Responses to consultation (closes 12<sup>th</sup> March) here:

[Guidance for Schools and Colleges: Gender Questioning Children - Department for Education - Citizen Space](https://www.citizen-space.org.uk/guidance-for-schools-and-colleges-gender-questioning-children-department-for-education/)

Stonewall response here: ['Not fit for purpose' - Stonewall's response to draft trans guidance for schools in England | Stonewall](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/press-releases/2023/12/2023-12-14-stonewall-response-to-draft-trans-guidance-for-schools-in-england/)



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# Trans+ inclusion in Secondary PE, School Sport and Dance: game on?



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## What do we know?

School leaders have been looking after their students as best they can for years (!)

Research tells us that:

- The need to move and exercise is crucial for health and well-being and these habits need to be established when young to avoid later adult health issues
- there is a mental health crisis amongst young people globally and growing
- trans+ young people are especially vulnerable at/in school and studies show that issues can be intensified in the area of PESSD
- teacher positivity can make a big difference
- when trans+ youth get support from parents and school their well-being and achievement improves
- there are trans+ people amongst wider community, including teachers and PESSD specialists
- sport is philosophically expanding its possibilities - from a traditional binary, towards a potentially more inclusive and sustainable mixed and unisex model



It is widely acknowledged that the need for pupils to move and exercise remains central to life-long health, well-being and learning (Bushell-Thornalley, 2021).

- Data from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) shows that more than half of adult health and wellbeing concerns start before the age of 14 (RCPCH, 2020)
- For professionals responsible for young learners throughout these formative years it is therefore crucial that both curriculum and pedagogy should shape education tailored for positive health and wellbeing that improves rather than exacerbates mental health anxieties (Thornalley, 2019; WHO, 2013).
- Both academic and medical research over the past two decades demonstrates that the homeostasis needed to live a fit and healthy life needs to be deliberately worked at, through the critically habit-forming period of compulsory education that goes on to steer an individual's life (Weed et al., 2016).
- In the UK, reports show an upward trend in mental health disorders from 9.7% in 2017 to 11.2 % in 2020 (RCPCH, 2020)
- The role of teachers and teacher educators in promoting engagement with physical activity, developing individual strengths and positively supporting all young people, especially vulnerable groups, is therefore likely to be critical for life-long well-being.

School is a setting and period in which TGD adolescents can be identified as particularly vulnerable group, at high risk of suffering violence and harassment (Devis-Devis et al., 2017).

- Statistics show that 78% of North American students who disclose their gender identities during primary and secondary education suffer some sort of harassment and 35% experience physical harassment (Grant, et al., 2011)
- In the European context, a survey showed that 46.2% of gender non-conforming young people suffered harassment within educational contexts in Spain (Davis-Devis, et al., 2017)
- Also published in 2017, Stonewall's *School Report*, produced by the centre for family research at the University of Cambridge, indicates that whilst anti-LGBT bullying and discriminatory language in UK schools had decreased since 2012, more than 2 in 5 trans young people have tried to take their own life (Stonewall, 2017).

Clare Wilson and Laura Cariola's 2019 systematic review of qualitative research on LGBTQI+ youth and mental health indicates that the provision of a positive school climate in which they can feel physically, emotionally and socially safe is vital for young LGBTQI+ people to thrive

- The importance of a positive school climate is heightened as LGBT+ pupils navigate the heteronormative environments of school (Wilson & Cariola, 2019)
- Their systematic review identifies five core themes which underpin the challenges for LGBT+ young people, namely rejection, marginalisation, self-harm/suicidality, policy/environment and connectedness.
- Amongst the key implications of this for practice and research, they propose:
  1. the mandated provision of safe spaces and places in educational institutions
  2. the targeted education of service providers in all social, educational and health agencies, along with continued efforts to address trans, bi, and homophobia
  3. they advocate that future research should fill gaps in knowledge to date (Wilson & Cariola, 2019).

In the specific field of LGBTQ research in PESS, Landi *et al's* systematic review of published scholarship on LGBTQ issues in physical education traces LGBTQ scholarship back to 1982.

- They observe that whilst there has been an increase in articles, which they describe as a 'rising tide', they nevertheless characterise it as exhibiting a 'cruel optimism', highlighting a complex web of interconnected and staunch problems that limit researchers.
- It is perhaps, due to the complex web of limitations on researchers that, despite the growth in published scholarship on LGBTQ issues in PESSD, there is a lack of research into the lived experiences of transgender people in sport.
- This work, as with some other studies (Devis-Devis et al, 2017) with TGD people is, nevertheless retrospective, meaning adult research participants looking back on their earlier school experiences.
- Four interconnected themes emerge from existing research:
  1. the intimidating nature of the changing/locker room environment;
  2. the impact of alienating experiences at school; the fear of public space and how this drastically constrains the ability to engage in sport and physical activity
  3. the overall effects of being denied the social, health and well-being aspects of sport (Hargie, Mitchell, & Somerville, 2017)



The few studies that offer insights into the experiences of trans+ youth, suggest that many issues are intensified in the PESSD area of the school curriculum (Drury S. , et al, 2017).

- Younger, secondary age LGBT+ research participants in the USA highlight that adults were particularly helpful in schools when they intervened in instances of harassment and bullying and put a stop to such behaviour (Greenspan, Griffith, Hayes, & Murtagh, 2019).
- This, along with private and/or gender-neutral changing spaces, the opportunity to wear gender affirming uniform and staff understanding the need to sometimes 'sit-out' as a self-protection strategy to avoid homo/trans phobic hostility, were key factors that helped with building their participation in PESSD.
- in an Australian study, teacher positivity is shown to have significant impact on TGD students' sense of connection to their school environment and becoming more confident and motivated learners, whose academic self-concept is higher (Ullman, 2017).
- The impact of teacher positivity is further supported by other research that indicates that TGD children who are supported by both their parents and their schools show beneficial academic and emotional outcomes that are crucial to their overall well-being (Davy & Cordoba, 2020)
- Other research argues for further shifts to achieve trans-inclusive education, that aspires beyond protection from violence and abuse, to validating TGD pupils in daily school life and across the curriculum, so that these young people grow in self-confidence and can excel and thrive at school (Horton, 2020).

It is important to acknowledge, of course, that school communities encompass not only TGD pupils, but also parents and staff, including PESSD teachers, whose presence and lived experiences offer valuable insights

- One (trans) PE teacher suggests that: ‘the most important thing you can be to a trans student is someone they can come to. If they need support, someone to listen, someone to be a role model, someone to accept them, someone to stick up for them, then be that person. If you can be that for them, then you can change lives’. (Foley, Pineiro, Miller, & Foley, 2016, p. 7)
- Given the importance (highlighted earlier) of teacher positivity, TGD teachers’ visible presence, particularly PESSD specialists, can affirm to others (colleagues, pupils, parents and teacher educators) that gender variation exists and that not everyone conforms to hegemonic masculinity or femininity (Bancroft & Greenspan, 2022).

There is evidence from previous research of some innovations in terms of TGD inclusive pedagogical practices such as in dance questions whether a new PE curriculum should be conceived that takes into account the lives of young people situated on the margins, observing that 'in any case more research is needed to improve the PE curricula and the well-being of all students' (Devis-Devis et al, 2017, p. 114)

- Some research questions whether a new PE curriculum should be conceived that takes into account the lives of young people situated on the margins, observing that 'in any case more research is needed to improve the PE curricula and the well-being of all students' (Devis-Devis et al, 2017, p. 114)
- Given that a male/female binary has traditionally been central to most sports, physical education teachers have tended to lean into what Larsson *et al* call the heterosexual (and heteronormative) matrix – the social conditioning by which young people (especially) feel that they can only engage in certain narrowly defined kinds of movement activity and still be viewed as 'normal' (Larsson, Redelius, & Fagrell, 2011)
- Larsson *et al*, suggest that PE teachers inviting pupils to reflect on this matrix, might help young people to move in new, perhaps different, unaccustomed ways, in order to be able to embody new identities. This European research, based in Sweden, highlights the value of acknowledging diversity amongst pupil populations and 'the multiple ways in which young people do gender' (Larsson, Redelius, & Fagrell, 2011, p. 80)

Recent work, based in Finland, that explores LGBTIQ+ pupils experiences of school PE lessons and the views of their teachers suggests that diversity in gender and sexuality is often 'tolerated' by teachers.

- LGBTIQ+ students articulate the need for greater teacher familiarity with diversity in gender and sexuality, less gender stereotyping, more inclusive language and advocate for mixed PE groupings as well as unisex changing facilities (Berg & Kokkonen, 2022)
- Recent PhD research highlights how mixed classes often provided a more positive environment for TNB(trans and non-binary) young people, as does offering activities regardless of gender 'typing', enabling all pupils to access rugby and netball, for example.
- To improve TNB inclusion they recommend further teacher education and professional development, the provision of mixed gender classes and equal access to different activities and private, safe changing spaces (Kettley-Linsell, 2022).

With a predominantly binary sex-based curriculum (typically boys do football/rugby, whilst girls do netball, for example), still operating in many settings, we ask how are PE teachers enabling TGD pupils to engage in PE, Dance and School Sport? We aim to explore the uncertainty that prevails amongst teachers as to what is considered good practice regarding TGD inclusion that is particularly apparent in PESS (Drury S. , et al, 2022).

- Shot put (ECT 3)
- Hairography (Mentor 3)
- Orienteering (Mentor 9)
- Tutor group (ECT 1)
- 28 spaces (Mentor 9)





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# Concluding thoughts

- teachers want to share impactful experience
- strong relationships and comfortable environments
- empowerment of self in and for the learners



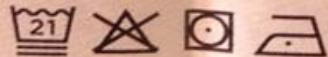
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