

LEGAL EQUALITY BETWEEN GAY & STRAIGHT CITIZENS

<http://www.youngstonewall.org.uk/lgbtq-info/legal-equality>

There have been amazing legal changes for LGBT equality in the UK. This is good news for everyone, because changing laws to ban discrimination against people makes it clear that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are not acceptable. It helps to change attitudes so that other people in society welcome LGBT people as equals. There is still a lot of work to be done, particularly for trans people's rights.

Some important legal changes that have affected LGBT people in the UK

- **2000: Government lifts the ban on lesbians and gay men serving in the Armed Forces.**

Before 2000, gay and lesbian people could not serve in the Armed Forces. They would have to keep their sexual orientation secret or they could be fired.

- **2001: Age of consent for gay/bi men is lowered to 16.**

Sex between men was illegal until 1967, when the Sexual Offences Act came into force making it legal for men aged 21 or above. In 1994 that age was lowered to 18 and in 2001 it was lowered again to 16 – making it the same as the age of consent for straight people.



- **2002: Equal rights are granted to same-sex couples applying for adoption.**

Before this neither same-sex couples nor unmarried straight couples could adopt or foster children.

- **2003: Repeal of Section 28.**

Section 28 was a law that made it illegal to talk positively about homosexuality in schools. This meant that teachers were not able to support lesbian, gay and bi students or provide resources about different sexualities. The law came into force in 1988 and a year later in 1989, Stonewall was set up to fight it. In 2003 the legislation was repealed which meant that schools were finally able to support their lesbian, gay and bi students.

- **2003: A new law comes into force protecting LGBT people from discrimination at work.**

Until 2003 employers could discriminate against LGBT people by not hiring them or not promoting them, just because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT people didn't have much protection from bullying and sometimes they weren't offered the same benefits as other colleagues, or were unfairly affected by rules at work. The Employment Equality Regulations made all these kinds of discrimination illegal.

- **2004: Civil Partnership Act is passed.**

Before this there was no legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Civil partnerships give same-sex couples the same legal rights as married couples. They allow same-sex couples to make the same public declaration of their love and commitment that other couples do when they get married.

- **2004: Gender Recognition Act is passed.**

Fought for by the organisation Press For Change, this Act allowed trans people to change their legal gender. This means that they can get a new birth certificate that reflects who they really are, which helps for future legal processes like marriage.

- **2005: The Criminal Justice Act gives courts power to give tougher sentences for homophobic crimes.**

Until 2005 if a person was attacked for being gay or because the attacker thought they were gay then it was treated like any other crime. The Criminal Justice Act changed that so that these were classed as 'hate crimes' and were treated more seriously.

- **2007: It becomes illegal to discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity when providing them with goods or services.**

Before 2007 any service provider could discriminate against an LGBT person who bought something from them or used their service. For example, a hotel owner could refuse to allow a gay couple to stay in their hotel, or a local authority could refuse to house a same-sex couple together. Today people can't be refused goods or services because they're lesbian, gay, bi or trans.

- **2008: The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act makes 'incitement to homophobic hatred' a crime.**

Before 2008 there was no law against behaviour or materials that stirred up hatred towards gay people. There were many publications and websites that said hateful things about gay people and encouraged damaging and unhelpful myths about them. All of these things are now illegal.

- **2009: A new law gives better legal recognition to same-sex parents.**

Until this law came into force, same-sex couples were treated differently by the law to other couples when it came to having a baby through fertility treatment. This law made it easier for same-sex couples to be recognised as the legal parents of their child.

- **2010: The Equality Act is passed.**

There used to be lots of different laws protecting LGBT people from discrimination. The Equality Act 2010 made things simpler by bringing all the protections for LGBT people into one law. It also made sure LGBT people were entitled to the same legal protections given to other groups of people who might face discrimination. In addition to this, public service providers like schools and hospitals have to show how their service is accessible to and supportive of LGBT people.

- **2013: The Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act is passed.**

Although same-sex couples could enter into Civil Partnerships before 2013, they weren't allowed to get married. The Marriage Act 2013 gave same-sex couples the opportunity to get married just like any other couple. Same-sex couples already in a Civil Partnership can now convert this to a marriage if they want to.