



# Opportunities to Start Conversations and Discussion

If you really want to change the culture and way of thinking in football in relation to LGBTIQ people, it is important to talk about it. In several countries like Belgium, the Netherlands and UK, the national football associations organise workshops and discussion meetings for football clubs. During these meetings they talk about experiences of people being LGBTIQ in football, and how clubs can take positive steps to be more inclusive.

If a workshop or discussion meeting is something that you would find useful in your club or organisation then you can find useful information below.

## 1 Organising a discussion about LGBTIQ-inclusion in football

First of all, decide who you would like to invite along to the discussion and where and when you will hold it so that as many people as possible can attend.

Creating a safe and open environment for a discussion is essential and people should be encouraged to share their opinions in an environment of confidentiality. Trainers / Coaches might like to hold a discussion with players, Senior Managers might like to hold a discussion with all football club staff in a wider group.

Check to see if your own football association organises workshops on this topic, as they may be able to support you with your own discussion. Also check to see if there are local LGBTIQ organisations that can support you with your meeting.

*TIP 1: The discussion could be part of a meeting that is already planned.*

*TIP 2: Use parts of the documentary or the app to start the discussion.*

## 2 How should you moderate this discussion?

As someone leading the discussion, it is useful to prepare some questions in advance to help the discussion flow. Using open questions can help the conversation to flow better. You might also want to prepare some example case studies and discuss with the group how you might react.

*TIP 1: As a moderator you do not have to give the right answers and solutions, but you can guide the conversation by asking relevant questions. It is important that the workshop participants express their feelings and thoughts about the subject and listen to other opinions.*

*TIP 2: Sometimes people do not feel comfortable to openly share their opinions. As a moderator you could use tools such as coloured cards; green for 'agree' and red for 'do not agree'.*



### 3 What kind of questions can you raise to help the discussion?

#### a Football and homosexuality

- When we say “football and homosexuality” what comes to mind?
- Why do you think that there are no openly ‘out’ gay male players in professional football?
- Why do you think that some players choose to keep their sexuality or gender identity a secret within football?
- Can you give any examples of professional players that have come out after their career has finished? Why do you think they waited to say something?
- What do you think you would do if a teammate came out as LGBTIQ?
- What do you think you would do if a Trainer / Coach came out as LGBTIQ?
- If you heard someone within your club using discriminatory language such as “puff”, “dyke” or “tranny” in football what would you do?

#### b Football role models

- Share a story of a real life football player or coach from the LGBTIQ community and use it to spark discussion with the workshop using some of the suggested questions above.

#### c Positive action

- What practical actions do you think that a football club can take to be more inclusive of LGBTIQ people?
- What practical actions do you think that a football association can take to be more inclusive of LGBTIQ people?
- Who do you think is responsible for taking action to make LGBTIQ people more welcome in football?
- What difficulties do you think there might be with taking positive action to address LGBTIQ inclusion in football?

### 4 Overcoming difficulties with discussions

Everyone has a different opinion about LGBTIQ people in football, and some people might have some strong negative opinions. Therefore, some discussions might be challenging, but remember that discussing this topic is an important part of changing attitudes. Changing attitudes can take time, but regular discussion and communication can help to change opinions. Below are some examples of statements that you might be faced with and some suggested responses.

#### a “There aren’t any LGBTIQ people in our club / organisation so why should we talk about it?”

- It is estimated that approximately 10% of people in society identify as LGBTIQ.
- In sports organisations this figure might be lower, why do you think this is?
- Many people in society choose to hide their sexuality or gender identity in their workplace, which could also include a football club or organisation. Why do you think people feel necessary to be secretive?

#### b “Football isn’t a sport for LGBTIQ people.”

It can be easy for people to make stereotypical judgements about LGBTIQ people and football based on either sexuality or gender identity. The ‘Out on the Fields’ study on homophobia in sport (2009), concluded that 54% of gay and 36% of lesbian people feel not accepted or only a little bit accepted in youth sports. According to the same study football is one of the most favourite sports for gay young people and gay men, but 81% choose to hide their sexuality within sport. This information does not support the idea that football isn’t a sport for LGBTIQ people.



**c “I don’t want to take a shower with LGBTIQ people – it would make me feel uncomfortable.”**

Chances are that LGBTIQ people would feel more uncomfortable than you. Research suggests that the changing room is a place where LGBTIQ people often feel uncomfortable due to the lack of privacy and the risk of experiencing homophobic behaviour or comments.

**d “Why should we take action to tackle homophobia as a football club? We already have a lot of things to do.”**

As a football club it is important that every member feels welcome, whether they are a player, staff member or fan. To create such a welcoming environment there needs to be a clear policy, rules and communication about LGBTIQ inclusion. We all have a responsibility to make sure that football is free from discrimination.

**e “This topic is not a priority for us.”**

The topic of LGBTIQ people in football is extremely important and we have a responsibility to ensure that our players, staff and fans feel safe and welcome here. Research suggests that LGBTIQ people are far more likely to struggle with their sexuality and gender identity and are more vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. This could affect some of our own players, staff and fans, which is why it is important to make it a priority.

**f “We already have some LGBTIQ people who are out of closet so why do we need to do more?”**

Whilst it is positive that some people feel safe to be ‘out’, this does not mean that everything is okay. It is always a good idea to evaluate the club policies and culture to see if there is room for improvement. Involving those who are ‘out’ in these discussions can help review actions more easily.

**g “By getting involved in homophobia campaigns, we’ll lose players, staff and fans who don’t like it.”**

Speaking out against homophobia is more important than losing individuals who think that homophobic views and actions are acceptable. Homophobia is not acceptable within football.

**h “I don’t have problems with LGBTIQ-people as long as they act normal.”**

It's useful to challenge this statement in terms of what constitutes ‘normal’ behaviour. What are their expectations of ‘normal’ behaviour and why do they assume that LGBTIQ people would not act ‘normal’.

**i “Words like ‘faggot’ or ‘gay’ are just a part of having a laugh with people.”**

Research suggests that a high proportion of LGBTIQ people have heard homophobic slurs in sports environments (refer to **‘Out on the Fields’** research). Words like these are unacceptable to use, even for fun.

**National Football Associations who offer information about this subject**

**Belgian FA:** <http://www.belgianfootball.be/fr/le-football-c-l%E2%80%99homophobie-1-0>

**English FA:** <http://www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/equality/lgbt-football>

**German FA:** <http://www.dfb.de/vielfaltanti-diskriminierung/fussball-und-homosexualitaet/>

**Dutch FA:** <http://www.knvb.nl/themas/homoacceptatie>