



# Rainbow Office Hours: A practical guide for staff

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*There is an online copy of this document that can be shared via a URL  
on [Sway](#).*

Rainbow Office Hours have run in the School of Psychology and Neuroscience (SPaN), University of Glasgow since 2019, normally timed to coincide with awareness days such as National Coming Out Day, International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia, and LGBT History Month. Students are invited to attend Rainbow Office Hours with an LGBTQ+ member of staff to discuss anything LGBTQ+

related. Attendance is variable, however, the impact of having visible LGBTQ+ staff has been hugely positive. LGBTQ+ students in SPaN have reported that they feel well represented and perceive SPaN as a welcoming and LGBTQ+ friendly school.

The topics of discussion during Rainbow Office Hours vary – some students ask for advice about LGBTQ+ spaces and organisations in Glasgow, some ask about University procedures and policies regarding name and gender changes, whilst others want to discuss their fears about coming out. Most, however, just want to talk to another LGBTQ+ person. This may be a particularly significant opportunity for international students who may never have had the opportunity to be publicly out, discuss their sexuality, or who need help to find queer spaces in a new city/country.

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The provision of Rainbow Office Hours is supported by research. There has been an increase in the number of university applicants who disclose an LGBTQ+ identity in their UCAS application, with 7.2% of the total UK domiciled applicants in 2020 (UCAS, 2021). Data from UCAS (2021), suggests that positive campus climate experiences at school or college are related to students being able to express their LGBTQ+ identities openly, while negative experiences are related to harassment based on identity and a lack of LGBTQ+ representation in the school/college educational curriculum.

Within the university curriculum, how LGBTQ+ friendly an academic subject area is perceived depends on how inclusive the subject is of LGBTQ+ identities (Forbes (2020)). Subject areas are perceived to be more LGBTQ+ friendly if they provided a platform for discussion of LGBTQ+ issues (e.g., in humanities and social sciences), compared to subjects which did not easily lend themselves towards such discussion (e.g. STEM). In Forbes (2020), LGBTQ+ students also reported that they would be more likely to seek support from staff in subjects perceived to be more LGBTQ+ friendly, than those in other subjects due to the teaching staff's experience in discussing LGBTQ+ issues.

Moving forward, we would like to encourage staff in other Schools, Colleges, and institutions to adopt Rainbow Office Hours during LGBT History Month in February (and beyond!). This document contains guidance on how to run the sessions and things to consider.

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## How to run Rainbow Office hours

**Setup:** We offer an extra hour of office hours timed to coincide with an awareness day/month although realistically Rainbow Office Hours could be offered at any point during the academic year. We have offered both online and in-person sessions. For online, we use Zoom with the waiting room enabled. For in-person sessions, we meet students in our offices. Both online and in-person sessions are drop-in as requiring students to book may put them off and some may not wish to be recorded as having attended.

**Staff comms:** We invite all members of the School to participate via a Teams channel that is available to all staff, GTAs, and postgraduate students. A template staff communication that can be adapted is provided below:

*February is LGBT History Month in the UK and we would like to invite LGBTQ+ staff to offer Rainbow Office Hours. These are an additional hour of office hours (online or in-person) provided by LGBTQ+ staff that students can drop in to discuss anything LGBTQ-related or most commonly, just to be able to talk to an LGBTQ+ person. If you would like to participate, please let us know the time and date of your extra office hours and the Zoom link if necessary (please be extra careful to ensure the waiting room is enabled). By agreeing to participate, you agree to your name being included in a list of LGBTQ+ identified staff that will be emailed to all psychology students. We don't need to know your particular colour of the rainbow but taking part will put you as part of the*

*community. Whilst the use of these office hours is generally quite low, the impact of staff being willing to be visibly LGBT is significant and we have had a number of students remark how much it meant to them. Rainbow Office Hours can be provided by staff, PGRs, and GTAs - representation at every level is important.*

**Student comms:** Rainbow Office Hours are communicated to students via Teams and Moodle mailing lists. Rainbow Office Hours are also advertised on the School's social media pages although times, dates, and locations were not advertised publicly and students were directed to check their email for details.

A template student communication that can be adapted is provided below:

*February is LGBT History Month in the UK and to mark the occasion LGBTQ+ staff in the School of Psychology and Neuroscience will be holding Rainbow Office Hours. Rainbow Office Hours are an opportunity for you to talk to an LGBTQ+ member of staff, although you do not have to identify as LGBTQ+ yourself to attend. Rainbow Office Hours are drop-in (see details below) and will be in the strictest of confidence.*

*Time/date/location information*

## Allies

Allies are vital to the progression of LGBTQ+ equality. Allies can support Rainbow Office Hours by sharing information about sessions with their students or indeed sharing this guidance with staff. Rainbow Office Hours are intended to increase the visibility of LGBTQ+ staff and to provide a forum for students to speak to an LGBTQ+ person. Additionally, shared lived experience is an important part of the process. For example, for National Coming Out Day, our communication to students references the fact that all staff hosting Rainbow Office Hours have themselves experienced the process of coming out. Consequently, our model of Rainbow Office Hours is predicated on the assumption that staff who host them will always identify as LGBTQ+.

## Support services

The purpose of Rainbow Office Hours is not to provide counselling or psychological support and most staff are not trained to provide such support. In our experience, very few students have this expectation of Rainbow Office Hours, however, it can be useful to have a list of support services to hand should you need to guide students to further help. Below are a list of resources that may be helpful to staff working at UofG/Scotland. If you are outwith Scotland, this list should give you a good idea of resources to locate for your local area/institution.

- [UofG Information for LGBT + Students](#) (includes e.g., how to change name or gender and links to university policies)
- [GULGBTQ+ student society](#)
- [Glasgow Bucket List](#) (contains a list of LGBTQ+ events and community spaces in Glasgow City)
- [UofG Counselling and Psychological Services](#)
- [LGBT Youth Scotland: Groups and Support](#)
- [Scottish Trans: Useful organisations](#)
- [LGBT Health and Wellbeing: Community services and support](#)

## Contact & references

If you would like to discuss Rainbow Office Hours further, please contact [Emily.Nordmann@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Emily.Nordmann@glasgow.ac.uk) (and please do let us know if you take up the idea, we'd love to hear about it!).

Additionally, here are a few references to related academic papers that may be of use.

- Advance HE (n.d. -a). Lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Advanced HE. Retrieved January 10, 2022, from <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/creating-inclusive-environment/lesbian-gay-and-bisexual-people>
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<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abe0933>
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- Patridge, E.V., Barthelemy, R. S., & Rankin, S. R. (2014) Factors impacting the academic climate for LGBQ STEM faculty. *J. Women Minorities Sci. Eng.* 20, 75–98 DOI: 10.1615/JWomenMinorScienEng.2014007429
- UCAS (2021). Next Steps: What is the experience of LGBT+ students in education? [https://www.ucas.com/next-steps-what-experience-lgbt-students-education?hash=iWMsuoMpHoBhyvsmDKLbZWe3RI3MaR8LRUIQ\\_UMO\\_V28](https://www.ucas.com/next-steps-what-experience-lgbt-students-education?hash=iWMsuoMpHoBhyvsmDKLbZWe3RI3MaR8LRUIQ_UMO_V28)