



House of Commons
Culture, Media and Sport
Committee

Homophobia in Sport

Seventh Report of Session 2016–17

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Culture, Media and Sport Committee

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1 Sport's problems with homophobia

Background

1. According to government estimates, approximately 6% of the UK population is gay and yet homophobia in sport remains a serious issue in the UK.¹ In 2012, the previous Culture, Media and Sport Committee undertook an inquiry into Racism in Football. A key conclusion of this report was that homophobia was emerging as a “bigger problem in football than racism and other forms of discrimination”.² Research at the time found that 25% of fans thought that homophobia was present in football in comparison to 10% who thought that racism was present in the sport. Since the previous Committee’s report, further research has been undertaken into homophobia, including into sports other than football.

2. The ‘Out on the Fields’ study—the first international study into homophobia in sport—provided perhaps the most comprehensive study of the issue to date. This study, which was published in 2015, highlighted youth sports as a particular issue. The majority of survey participants (73%) did not believe that youth sports were a ‘supportive and safe’ place for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) participants. The UK was broadly in line with the international consensus on this, with 70% of UK respondents agreeing with this statement.³ Other concerning findings related to homophobic language and jokes heard within sport, with 84% of participants reporting hearing homophobic jokes and humour within sport⁴ and 49% of UK participants believing that, within sporting environments, homophobia is most likely to occur within spectator stands.⁵ These findings were underpinned by a recent BBC Radio 5 Live programme where it was reported that 8% of football fans surveyed would stop watching their team if they signed an openly gay player.⁶ Additionally, a recent Stonewall survey reported that 72% of football fans have heard homophobic abuse.⁷ Moreover, as we describe below, homophobic leaflets have been distributed, and homophobic chanting has taken place this season. The problem is not going away.

3. These findings are echoed in relation to sports other than football. One of the most high-profile instances involved rugby union referee Nigel Owens, who was the victim of homophobic abuse at a match in 2014.⁸ In diving, Tom Daley has had similar experiences, having received homophobic abuse on social media.⁹

4. While the Committee has long held concerns over homophobia and its prevalence in sport, our current inquiry was in part prompted by Tyson Fury’s nomination for BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 2015. Mr Fury was placed on the shortlist, despite the fact that he had previously made numerous violently homophobic comments. We queried

1 [This figure comes from a 2004 Treasury Report to assess the financial implications of the Civil Partnerships Act, 2004](#)

2 Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Racism in Football, Second Report of Session 2012–13, HC 89, para 18

3 Out on the Fields: The first international study on homophobia in sport, Denison E, Kitchen A. (2015), p46–47

4 Ibid. p12

5 Ibid. p53

6 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/37760114>

7 <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/media-centre/media-release/homophobic-views-sport>

8 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/rugbyunion/international/england/11227491/Rugby-Football-Union-to-open-investigation-after-England-fans-subject-referee-Nigel-Owens-to-homophobic-abuse.html>

9 <http://www.itv.com/news/update/2013-12-03/mp-condemns-tom-daley-gay-relationship-twitter-abuse/>

the judgment of BBC executives in including Fury on the shortlist when taking evidence from Lord Hall, the Director-General of the BBC. We were dissatisfied and concerned by his response to the controversy when Hall reaffirmed that he ‘believed in the process’ of selection for the Sports Personality of the Year award and he declined to condemn Fury’s inclusion on the shortlist.¹⁰ **We consider that the inclusion of Tyson Fury in the shortlist for BBC Sports Personality of the Year was symptomatic of homophobia not being taken seriously enough in sport. It provides an example of how homophobic abuse is allowed to pass unchallenged too often.**

5. We acknowledge that there are very serious issues in relation to transgender people in sport and the problems they face. There are also significant differences between these issues and homophobia, which has been the primary focus of this report.

6. Taking all matters into account, however, progress has been made in recent years with respect to attitudes towards and LGB visibility¹¹ within sport. LGB visibility, in particular, has increased significantly over the last few years as is shown by the inclusion of 44 sportspeople known to be LGB in the incredibly successful United Kingdom team at the Rio Olympics in 2016. There is also a small but significant number of high-profile, openly gay sportspeople, Tom Daley and Welsh rugby international Gareth Thomas being perhaps the most notable. We also acknowledge that a number of governing bodies have reaffirmed their commitment to tackling homophobia. However, not enough progress has been made. Homophobia remains a problem in sport across all levels and sport appears to be well behind society as a whole when it comes to tolerance and acceptance as well as LGB visibility. Indeed, John Amaechi, the former NBA player, told us that ‘sport still lags behind as a segment of society, and I think purposefully so’.¹²

7. Because of these continuing concerns, and in particular because of the BBC’s Tyson Fury controversy, we decided to undertake a short inquiry into homophobia in sport. We have taken into consideration not only recent events but also the long-term effects and repercussions felt from homophobia, in the context of all levels of sport from children taking part in school games lessons to Olympians and Premier League footballers. We received 40 written submissions and took oral evidence from Dr Mark McCormack of Durham University, Dr Jamie Cleland of Loughborough University, Professor Ian Rivers of the University of Strathclyde, John Amaechi, Tom Bosworth, the Olympic race-walker, Nigel Owens, rugby union referee, Paul Twocock, Director of Campaigns, Policy and Research at Stonewall, Di Cunningham, organiser of Proud Canaries, the LGB fan group at Norwich City Football Club and Jamie Hooper, Equality and Diversity Programme Manager at the Amateur Swimming Association. We would like to thank all those who gave evidence to us.¹³

10 Oral evidence to the Committee, BBC Charter Review, 16 December 2015, Q 687: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/culture-media-and-sport-committee/bbc-charter-review/oral/26322.html>

11 ‘LGB visibility’ is defined here as demonstrating the LGB community as representative and positive in society

12 Q 88

13 Oral and written evidence are published on the Committee’s website at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/culture-media-and-sport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/homophobia-in-sport-15-16/publications/>. Oral evidence is referred to in this Report by question number (‘Q x’)

Sports

8. Over the course of our three evidence sessions, we heard about experiences from a range of sports including football, rugby, athletics, aquatics and basketball. We found that football was the sport mentioned most frequently by our witnesses as having a problem with homophobia; in particular, the Football Association came under criticism for its lack of a coherent strategy on how to tackle homophobia and its perceived inaction. John Amaechi, when giving evidence to us, said of the FA and FIFA:

What we have at the moment is an abject contravention of the principles of the sport itself. Whether you are looking at the FA, FIFA or the IOC, if you read their own conventions and principles, it is clear that the status quo contravenes them, whether it be the deaths of people building stadiums in Qatar or whether it be the treatment of women in certain countries and their access to sport or whether it be the way LGB people are treated in the stands and on the fields at every level.¹⁴

9. As the most popular spectator sport in the UK, it is of great concern that there are no prominent football players in this country who are openly gay, meaning that there is very little by way of LGB visibility for LGB youth. Football has a problematic history with homophobia. As recently as October 2016, it was reported that homophobic leaflets were being distributed outside the Olympic stadium prior to a match between West Ham and Chelsea.¹⁵ Homophobic chants at football games are reasonably commonplace, with a number of incidents reported in 2016. One such incident was reported at a match between Luton Town and Leyton Orient earlier in October,¹⁶ and in light of this incident, Greg Clarke, Chair of the FA commented that:

There is a very, very small minority of people who hurl vile abuse at people who they perceive are different. Our job is stamp down hard on that behaviour. There was an example at the weekend where there were allegations at Leyton Orient versus Luton that the Luton fans were hurling homophobic abuse at a group of men who they perceived to be gay. That behaviour is disgusting and needs stamping out and I am absolutely determined that we do stamp it out.¹⁷

If I was a gay man, why would I expose myself to that? Our job is to identify anybody guilty of persecuting in any way members of a minority, an ethnic minority, a sexual minority or even gender, women get vile abuse too. Our job as the regulator is to come down like a tonne of bricks and make sure that that sort of abhorrent behaviour is driven from the game.¹⁸

14 Q 133

15 <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/west-ham-to-ban-200-fans-over-crowd-trouble-wtqz907r8?shareToken=f4cad78d3aec3fcc984b8cce222bb0c3>

16 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/37677358>

17 Oral evidence to the Committee, The Governance of Football, 17 October 2016, Q 155: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/culture-media-and-sport-committee/the-governance-of-football/oral/41531.html>

18 *Ibid.* Q 156

10. Furthermore, Clarke said that he ‘would be amazed’ if there were no gay players in the Premier League and that he was ‘personally ashamed’ that these players do not feel safe to come out.¹⁹

11. The suggestion by the Chair of the FA that football may not be a safe environment for players to come out is particularly troubling. This is especially so considering that the first and only British professional player to come out as gay was Justin Fashanu in 1990. He committed suicide in 1998. In the intervening years, he had been subjected to homophobic abuse and press intrusion and his career dwindled. **We are very concerned that, despite the significant change in society’s attitudes to homosexuality in the last 30 years, there is little reflection of this progress being seen in football, particularly in terms of LGB visibility. Indeed, it is often LGB supporters who provide the only LGB visibility at football stadia.** Di Cunningham, of Proud Canaries said:

So much more needs to be done. We have talked about improvements over the years, but it is really patchy, looking at homophobia in football at the moment. Proud Canaries has been an amazing journey. We have only been around for just over a couple of years and we were the second officially-recognised LGB fan group, after Gay Gooners. It seems to be the fact that there is some LGB visibility at Carrow Road that has really changed things for everybody, not just for LGB people. There is no LGB visibility on the pitch in football, in elite men’s football, in terms of players or officials, but we evidently have LGB fans.²⁰

12. Rugby was a sport which also featured frequently throughout our evidence sessions in both positive and negative terms. Rugby has comparatively high LGB visibility, especially in contrast to other popular sports such as football. One of the most successful rugby referees in the world, Nigel Owens, is openly gay, as is former Welsh International Gareth Thomas. Keegan Hirst, who currently plays rugby league for Wakefield Trinity Wildcats, is also openly gay. However, despite this encouraging LGB visibility within rugby, the game is not devoid of problems with homophobia. There have been a number of instances of homophobia at rugby matches, including abuse directed at Nigel Owens: one instance being during a match between England and New Zealand in November 2014, when Owens was subjected to ‘foul-mouthed, racist, homophobic abuse’.²¹ This resulted in two fans being banned for two years and ordered to pay £1,000 to a charity of Owens’ choice. Commenting immediately after the incident, Owens expressed his concern that homophobia was an increasing problem within rugby, adding: “It’s not me they’re hurting, it’s the young kid sitting in the row in front who’s maybe dealing with their own sexuality ... I know they can tip you over the edge.”²²

13. This 2014 incident was followed by a police investigation in 2015, when police were alerted to homophobic abuse sent to Owens on Twitter after a Six Nations game between England and France.²³

19 Ibid. Q 154

20 Q 177

21 <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/nov/11/shamed-by-bigoted-england-rugby-fans-at-all-blacks-game>

22 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/rugby-union/30254064>

23 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/england/11488749/Police-investigate-homophobic-abuse-of-Nigel-Owens-after-England-game.html>

14. More recently, in September 2016, a Batley Bulldogs fan was banned from the club's stadium for sending homophobic tweets to Keegan Hirst. The club confirmed that the fan would no longer be allowed in the stadium and said that they wished to "send out a clear message that if you engage in such behaviour, we do not want you to attend our stadium."²⁴ This response from Batley Bulldogs appears to be broadly in line with the generally tougher stance that rugby has taken in comparison to football. While this sport undoubtedly has its problems, it has taken admirable and appropriate steps to address and tackle homophobia where it has arisen.

15. Homophobia is of course not solely limited to the realms of rugby and football. In boxing, we have already noted the controversy caused by Tyson Fury's inclusion on the BBC Sports Personality of the Year shortlist; furthermore, eight-time boxing world champion Manny Pacquiao has previously made homophobic remarks, including describing gay people as 'worse than animals'.²⁵ This statement led to Nike terminating their contract with him. Further comments were recently made by the darts player, Eric Bristow, who made homophobic comments in relation to allegations of child sex abuse in football.²⁶ Bristow's tweets were subsequently reported to Staffordshire Police as a 'hate crime'.

16. In athletics, we heard from Tom Bosworth about the homophobia he had previously encountered, particularly when competing at the lower levels: "About four or five years ago, some former athletes in local athletics would verbally abuse me. It was pretty nasty, and made worse by the fact they found it funny."²⁷ Also in athletics, double Olympic gold medallist, the Russian pole-vaulter Yelena Isinbayeva, was accused of making homophobic comments.

17. Away from athletics, John Amaechi told us of the extensive homophobic backlash he experienced as the first openly gay NBA player after he came out in 2007.²⁸ The abuse directed at Amaechi was particularly ferocious, with fellow NBA player Tim Hardaway saying:

First of all I wouldn't want him on my team. Second of all, if he was on my team I would really distance myself from him because I don't think that's right and I don't think he should be in the locker room when we're in the locker room. Something has to give. If you have 12 other ball players in your locker room that's upset and can't concentrate and always worried about him in the locker room or on the court or whatever, it's going to be hard for your teammates to win and accept him as a teammate.²⁹

18. However, we note that there is much to be positive about and a number of sports have demonstrated particularly progressive attitudes and a commitment to making change. In particular, aquatic sports have a high number of LGB role-models, including Tom Daley, the Australian diver, Matthew Mitcham, a gold medallist at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, and Ian Thorpe, one of the most successful swimmers of all time. Tom Daley announced in 2013 that he was in a relationship with a man. This announcement was not without its detractors: homophobic abuse and comments were directed at Daley at the time of

24 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-37278162>

25 <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/16/sport/boxing-manny-pacquiao-animals-gay/>

26 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/darts/38141331>

27 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/athletics/34496877>

28 Q 129

29 <http://www.espn.co.uk/nba/news/story?id=2766213>

the announcement and further homophobic abuse was documented on social media throughout the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio. However, the press and public reaction was, for the most part, very positive. Daley's career has gone from strength to strength, not just with a further Olympic medal win but also with a successful media career with a number of high-profile corporate sponsorships. Daley's sponsorships and earnings have actually increased since his coming out in 2013 and this is, of itself, very encouraging.

19. *We also commend the Amateur Swimming Association for the work it does with LGB swimmers and the steps it is taking towards developing tailored toolkits in order to help operators best assist in the recent upsurge in transgender participation, as well as their support for "safe spaces" and gay-friendly swimming clubs. The ASA ran LGB roadshows to get people to engage with its audit in partnership with the Government Equalities Office steering group, Pride Sports, Ditch the Label, Transsexuals in Sport and Stonewall. We encourage other sporting bodies to follow examples such as these and initiate similar outreach programmes.*³⁰

20. We would also like to acknowledge the work undertaken by lesser-known sports towards tackling homophobia and providing an open and welcoming environment for the LGB community. Paul Twocock of Stonewall drew the Committee's attention to the work of the UK Roller Derby Association:

The UK Roller Derby Association, a very small governing body, don't have many resources but have proved that you can do it. They have developed a policy on gender and sexual orientation that is well-used by the sport and is creating an inclusive sport for LGB people. You don't need to have huge resources to do this, but what you need is leadership and determination and commitment.³¹

21. Women's football offers a positive environment for LGB players and fans and is especially notable in that it provides a number of high-profile LGB role-models including Casey Stoney, former England Coach Hope Powell and England players Melanie Garside-Wright and Lianne Sanderson. We have heard that the women's game tends to be more accepting than the men's, with very few reports of homophobic abuse and language.³² We believe that, in general, the women's game offers a safe and positive environment for LGB youth as a result. However, we acknowledge that women's football is not without its own problems. Women who play football are often assumed to be gay, a comment also often heard in rugby. When giving evidence to us, England international Lianne Sanderson said:

For me, as a female athlete, it is certainly a lot different to a male athlete. With female athletes I think stereotypically they expect females to be gay who play sports³³

I would not say it is easier. I just think that with female athletes, people automatically stereotypically assume that female athletes are gay. I think

30 [\(HIS0029\)](#) (Amateur Swimming Association)

31 Q 180

32 Q 136

33 Q 134

that it is one of those things where if a female athlete comes out and says that they are gay, people automatically expect that, which again is a problem in itself.³⁴

Participation

22. There is a significantly higher drop-out rate in sport among LGB youth than there is among heterosexual youth, with the Out on the Fields survey showing that there is a significant decline in LGB participants as they grow older. It is particularly striking that 30% of gay men surveyed said that their experiences of school physical education classes were what discouraged them.³⁵ However, we do not wish to oversimplify this problem by placing the blame for this decline in participation solely on the effects of physical education classes. Indeed, the reasons are likely to be far more complex. Professor Ian Rivers said:

The key thing to stress is that I do not believe there is necessarily a huge issue now within school-based sport. I think the issue is more associated with extra-curricular and non-curricular sports, where you have coaches, etc, who are not aware of the issues they have to address. Everyone within teacher education and the training of teachers is aware of the Equality Act and the implications of it.³⁶

23. However, it does seem likely that negative experiences of school sport have an impact on whether or not people decide to participate in sport as an adult.³⁷ Furthermore, for many young gay people, experiences of school sport have a deleterious effect on their sense of self-worth. This is not just ‘playground banter’ and, unless it is swiftly and firmly challenged by teachers, it amounts to bullying. Schools should explicitly address the question of unacceptable homophobic language in their bullying policies, and consider ways in which they can make their sports programmes more diverse and sensitive to the barriers to participation faced by young gay people. ***We recommend that sport governing bodies—many of which have been doing good work in encouraging girls to take part in sport at school—extend their work in schools explicitly to address the problem of homophobia.***

24. The Out on the Fields survey found that 70% of British gay males under the age of 22 who participated in the survey were either completely or partially closeted from their teammates.³⁸ Reasons cited for this included a fear of bullying, a fear of being rejected by teammates and a concern about discrimination from officials. Research conducted by Sport Wales suggests that 40% of LGB people have been discouraged from participation in sport and that 60% would be more likely to participate if sport were more LGB-friendly.³⁹ **We have serious concerns over the effects of low participation among LGB youth on their mental and physical health and well-being and we note that, in the long-term, it is very likely that a number of sports have been robbed of talent by the fact that promising young players have not felt accepted or supported in the sport they play. It appears that young players and athletes sometimes feel that they have to make the**

34 Q 140

35 Out on the Fields Report, p17

36 Q 32

37 See also the previous Committee’s report on *Women and sport*

38 Out on the Fields Report, p25

39 ([HIS0009](#)) Sport Wales

active choice between either coming out or continuing to participate in their chosen sport. As a result, players and athletes either drop out of sport together or, as has been the case with some professional sportspeople, they wait until after retirement to come out.

Language

25. Over the course of our evidence sessions, we heard a great deal about the use of homophobic language, particularly the tendency to dismiss it as ‘banter’. Research from BBC Radio 5 Live found that 50% of football fans have heard homophobic abuse at football matches, while a Stonewall survey put this figure at 72%. It is beyond dispute that homophobic language remains persistent in sport, and it is clear that this is a particular problem within football. We are concerned that, all too often, the use of this language is not taken seriously enough, particularly as we have heard throughout this inquiry about how it often causes upset to both players and fans. Nigel Owens told us of his concerns, based on personal experience, that the prevalence of this kind of language in sport often leads to young people finding it harder to accept their sexuality and come out and may even so reduce self-esteem that it leads to self-harm.⁴⁰ This is not a problem restricted to spectator sports. Homophobic terms are also prevalent at schools and at sport at the grassroots levels. **It is clear to us that the casual use of homophobic epithets and terms has a wide-ranging and damaging effect and we consider it very disappointing that a significant percentage of people consider anti-LGB language to be harmless. It should be treated in the same way as other offensive language, whether racist, sexist or denigrating any other group.**

26. Players may also be exposed to homophobic language from teammates, not just spectators in the ground. Someone from a leading professional football club, who did not want to be named, told us that within the privacy of the locker room players often engage in banter with each other that has real edge, and whilst not necessarily cruelly meant, is nevertheless designed to tease out any perceived weakness or vulnerability. This can include homophobic remarks, as well as other language that would not bear public scrutiny. The intense atmosphere of a locker room containing elite sportsmen, many of whom may come from communities with wildly different attitudes to homosexuality, is not a normal working environment. In such an atmosphere it would be understandable, though, if gay players felt, that, if they were to come out, they could be a target for verbal abuse. This is something that we have heard time and time again from witnesses throughout our inquiry and, more recently, we were concerned by comments made by the footballer Adam McCabe who spoke of his experiences as a gay footballer who felt compelled to keep his sexuality a secret:

In the locker room, there is banter—and for a closeted athlete, it can be intimidating ...

When people use words like ‘faggot’, ‘poof’ or ‘queer’, it’s usually a split-second decision and they’re not really thinking about what they’re saying. But when you’re a closeted athlete sitting there, looking at your coach saying these things, you’re taken aback.⁴¹

40 Q 164

41 <http://www.skysports.com/football/news/11096/10758093/a-gay-footballers-story-adam-mccabe-on-homophobia-mental-health-and-falling-in-love-with-soccer-all-over-again>

27. **Sports clubs are responsible for the wellbeing of their players, and it would be unacceptable for coaches and managers to allow homophobic language to be used without comment or redress, just as it would for racist behaviour to go without reprimand. People within football will know whether this insight applies to their club and should act accordingly to show that they take homophobia seriously.**

Effects of keeping sexuality secret

28. We acknowledge that the presence of homophobia within sport and the lack of LGB visibility may often have a damaging effect on those who feel alone or that they cannot be open about their sexuality. Nigel Owens told us about the damaging effects that this had on him and his mental health, detailing his feelings of being suicidal and the huge impact this had on both him and his family.⁴² It is important to acknowledge just how much of an impact that keeping sexuality a secret may have. We are grateful to both Tom Bosworth and Nigel Owens for telling us about their very personal experiences of this and acknowledge that this is something that is likely to be faced by large numbers of people across the country. Conversely, we have heard throughout our inquiry that coming out often has a positive impact on an athlete's performances, underlining how personal happiness is often linked to success. We were told by John Amaechi that the pressure of keeping one's sexuality a secret often means the difference between "being good or great".⁴³ Tom Bosworth told us that his performances improved after coming out, saying:

I am so glad I did, because I was asked that question, "Would it change your life completely?" and I said, "No, not at all". It has, all for the better. My performances this year, I am still in shock, and that is perhaps because I have no concerns, no worries at all, that final little piece of the jigsaw, so I am so glad I did that.⁴⁴

29. A possible further effect of the unwillingness of sport to confront homophobia has been hinted at after recent sexual abuse allegations within football came to light. One of those who came forward, David Eatock, a former Newcastle United player, said the following when going public with his allegations:

I was embarrassed. I'm not homophobic by any stretch of the imagination but I was worried that people were going to think I was gay and that I must have encouraged it.⁴⁵

It must be considered that the attitudes of those in football to homosexuality may have contributed to a culture of silence and therefore prevented sexual abuse allegations from coming to light earlier. It was tragic that when David Eatock spoke last year about being a victim of sexual abuse from his football coach in the 1990s, he said that he had been afraid to report the abuse in case people thought that he was gay and to blame for it.

42 Q 165–168

43 Q 108

44 Q 107

45 <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/nov/30/david-eatock-abuse-newcastle-united>

2 How things can change

LGB visibility

30. As has been made clear, there are no openly gay players in the professional football leagues in England and Scotland. The presence of LGB figures in other roles such as officials and coaches is very limited. Therefore LGB visibility, where it exists, is generally provided by LGB supporters' groups. These supporters' groups are a relatively recent development, with the first of these the 'Gay Gooners' from Arsenal Football Club, being founded at the beginning of 2014. Several other clubs have since been formed including the 'Proud Canaries' of Norwich City Football Club, the 'Canal St. Blues' of Manchester City and the 'Proud Lilywhites' of Tottenham Hotspur and there are now 24 LGB fan groups. We heard from the organiser of Proud Canaries, Di Cunningham, about the role and importance of Norwich's and other LGB fan groups. She told us how LGB visibility at the Norwich City ground at Carrow Road has been brought about through members of Proud Canaries parading on the pitch at half-time, as well as the group's banner being displayed on the pitch.⁴⁶ Fan groups also engage in educational programmes, such as involvement with staff and steward training. Proud Canaries, in particular, have taken on an advisory role when Norwich City reviewed its stadium signage, ensuring that, in the future, it must specifically make reference to the policy of not tolerating homophobia. It is particularly notable that supporters' groups take part in engagement schemes with the wider LGB community, such as providing tickets to matches to those in the LGB community who have not been to a football match before.⁴⁷ We consider innovative schemes such as these to be particularly important.

31. We also appreciate the work of clubs such as Crystal Palace Football Club which has a full-page LGB fan group section in its programme for each match.⁴⁸ Having LGB visibility within sports stadia is important as it appears to help put homophobic abuse into context. Spectators are less likely to engage in homophobic behaviour if they can identify with the group which they are mocking—for example, by realising that some of their fellow fans are LGB and are likely to be hurt and offended by such attacks. Many supporters' groups run social media accounts where they challenge the use of homophobic language where it is used. This is an important step towards tackling the anachronistic and often embedded use of homophobic language and can educate others as to why it is not acceptable.

32. We are hopeful that increased LGB visibility will encourage the 'self-reporting' of homophobic incidents among fans. Spectators are more likely to become increasingly uncomfortable with hearing anti-LGB language on the terraces. Di Cunningham described this as "a crowd taking control of their match-day experience". Cunningham told us that she believed that the increase in reported homophobic incidents was not due to an increase in homophobia but, rather, an increased confidence among fans to challenge language that they were uncomfortable with. She said:

It was not because Norwich City is a really homophobic place. It isn't. It was just that people were calling it. (The crowd) don't want to hear homophobic abuse. They may well have gay, lesbian, bi or trans relatives or friends and they don't want to hear that kind of stuff.⁴⁹

46 Q 177

47 (HIS0021) Proud Canaries

48 Westminster Hall Debate, Homophobia in Sport, HC Deb, 30 November 2016, Column 623WH

49 Q 177

33. The work of LGB supporters is significant and should be actively encouraged by their affiliated clubs. Clubs should take a tougher stance when homophobic abuse is directed at these groups. We have heard how, at a match against Birmingham City in 2014, homophobic comments were directed at Proud Canaries when they paraded on the pitch at halftime. Similarly, Gay Gooners faced homophobic abuse after they were founded, particularly on social media where offensive comments were made relating to the fan group. Those who were responsible for the comments made at the Norwich City vs. Birmingham City match were warned about their future conduct and told that they would face an 'indefinite ban' if they were to offend again.⁵⁰ ***Football clubs should take a tougher approach to incidents of homophobic abuse, issuing immediate bans. We are not advocating immediate lifetime bans. Instead, issuing bans of one to two years in the first instance would indicate clearly that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated.***

Safe Spaces

34. We recognise the importance of safe and welcoming environments in which to participate in sport for the LGB community and believe that LGB-friendly sports clubs go some way towards addressing the problem of historically low participation rates among the LGBT community. We would particularly like to commend the work of the Amateur Swimming Association, who have been trailblazers in encouraging LGB participation and have been proactive in assessing how best to assess the needs of this community. We would like to encourage the national governing bodies of all sports to take the time to identify what the key barriers to participation are and how it can be encouraged. It is important for all national governing bodies to develop up-to-date and tailored toolkits on how best to approach LGBT participation sensitively and ensure that all staff are educated and aware enough to assist and deal with queries appropriately.

35. ***We believe that LGB-specific sessions within sport may be beneficial. We would also encourage all national governing bodies to promote the establishment and development of LGB-friendly clubs which are to be affiliated to the relevant governing body. This must be understood as a measure of encouraging inclusivity of all sports enthusiasts regardless of their sexual preference and by no means seen as a move towards creating divisions between specific groups or members of society.***

Role Models

36. We recognise the importance of LGB role-models within sport and, as we acknowledged earlier, believe that openly LGB sportspeople such as Tom Daley, Gareth Thomas and Casey Stoney have been of great help and comfort to LGB youth who may be struggling with their sexuality. Seeing an openly gay man such as Tom Daley achieve success gives LGB youth a figure to identify with at a time when they often feel alone. Those who may be struggling to come to terms with who they are may see someone like Tom Daley and think that if he can be happy and successful then they can too. Jamie Hooper of the Amateur Swimming Association told us of the importance of sportspeople as role models when he said:

50 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-30130646>

People like Tom have changed a generation of thinking about coming out in sport, particularly because he did it so young, so early on in his career and then had gone on to achieve great things. ...That offers a lot of support for younger people particularly who want to come out.⁵¹

37. However, we are aware that coming out is often a very difficult and personal decision to make. John Amaechi described the experience:

People coming out—your identity is the most precious thing you have. It is one of the most precious and fragile things that we have, so what you are doing when you come out is not just a statement about you, it is a statement about the people around you. You are saying to them, “Here is the most precious thing I have. I am entrusting you with it, knowing that you will take as good a care of this as I would”.⁵²

38. We welcome the increasing LGB visibility within sport and note that many sports, particularly rugby, have made significant progress in this respect. However, we feel that no sportsperson should feel under undue pressure or feel ‘forced’ to come out. Coming out is a personal and private decision which should not be determined by others.

39. We regret that there is so little LGB visibility in football. We warmly support and encourage the first player, or group of players, who feel they are comfortable and confident enough to come out as we believe that they will make a valuable and significant contribution to football.

Corporate Sponsorship

40. Throughout this inquiry it has become clear that there is a general perception that coming out would affect corporate sponsorship adversely. A fear of a loss of income, in addition to all of the other concerns we have cited, may prevent sportspeople from coming out. This is particularly the case when considering those sportspeople who may not be out but who are already high-profile as they would have more to lose. This is especially true within football where there is higher earning potential from sponsorships than most other sports. This goes some way in explaining why there are no openly gay players in the English professional leagues. The idea that someone may have to risk their livelihood is undoubtedly a daunting one. We have very little evidence in relation to this and so it is unclear what, in reality, the reaction from sponsors would be and the effect it would have. Indeed, the main frame of reference that we have is Tom Daley, who actually saw his sponsorship earnings increase significantly after he came out.

41. In the US, leading sports brands have taken significant steps to show their support for gay athletes. Adidas has amended its endorsement contracts to ensure against cancellations or changes should an athlete come out as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Nike also cancelled its endorsement contract with the Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao, and stopped selling all Pacquiao-branded merchandise following derogatory comments he made about homosexuality in a television interview—an act that stands in stark contrast to the BBC

51 Q 183

52 Q 104

allowing Tyson Fury's name to be put forward for Sports Personality of the Year in 2015.⁵³ In Australia, Skins, the leading compression sportswear brand, has created the Rainbow Round of Sport, using the rainbow laces campaign created by Stonewall, to encourage all leading sportsmen and women to show their support for gay, lesbian and transgender athletes.⁵⁴

42. The main corporate sponsors have a duty to assure sportspeople that they will not lose their sponsorship as a direct result of coming out. Major sponsors should come together to launch an initiative in the UK to make clear that, should any sportsperson wish to come out, they will have their support.

Campaigns

43. Campaigns can make a real difference. Racism within sport, and particularly in football, while not eradicated is no longer as prevalent as it once was and this situation has improved immeasurably since the 1980s. We consider that high-profile, cohesive and long-running campaigns such as 'Show Racism the Red Card' and 'Kick It Out' have had a significant role to play in this.

44. We acknowledge the work and impact of Stonewall's Rainbow Laces initiative, its national campaign to tackle homophobia in football. Stonewall sent rainbow laces to every professional football player in England to wear in support of the campaign. In 2014, 75% of Premier League teams and 75 clubs wore rainbow laces and the campaign achieved national media coverage, with an estimated reach of 30% among the general public and 67% of football fans.⁵⁵

45. However, while the Rainbow Laces campaign has been significant in engaging fans and raising awareness, further support to this campaign should be given by national governing bodies, especially as it takes steps to expand to other sports beyond just football. We agree with the assertion made by Paul Twocock, Head of Campaigns at Stonewall, that sports industry leaders should 'own the campaign'. Stonewall told us that while their campaigns have a positive impact on those who see them, their reach can be limited. We heard that a recent campaign weekend, while having a positive impact on those aware of it, was only seen by 14% of the population—only one in five of whom were sports fans.

46. We recommend that national governing bodies commit funds and resources to supporting further and more visible interventions as part of the Rainbow Laces campaign. This should incorporate television and cinema advertisements, screens at football matches and outside advertising such as bus-stop advertisements. This must be a sustained effort over a significant period of time, rather than a short-term commitment.

53 http://www.espn.com/boxing/story/_/id/14793389/nike-ends-endorsement-contract-manny-pacquiao

54 <https://www.skins.net/au/rainbow-round-of-sport-fixtures/>

55 [\(HIS0031\)](#) Stonewall

47. We heard how ‘straight allies’ within sport wield great influence on attitudes and the capacity for change. Stonewall told us that having Arsenal players speak out as such as part of their Rainbow Laces campaign ensured that they had a huge impact and raised awareness with new audiences. We believe that if more high-profile footballers took part in a campaign in which they actively spoke out on an anti-homophobic agenda, then this would be very powerful. Paul Twocock, told us how it was ‘essential’ to have such support and told us that:

it is a really crucial part of the Rainbow Laces campaign, seeing many high-profile football and rugby players during the campaign weekend we held at the end of November, making clear that they supported the campaign visibly, that visible commitment, the visible commitment from leaders in sport, from the Premier League and the Rugby Football Union, that is all vital to start creating the change.

We did some spot evidence after that campaign weekend in November that demonstrated those people that saw the campaign; there was a shift in their attitude just from that one experience.⁵⁶

48. *We believe that the FA, in particular, should encourage the participation of straight players in education programmes and campaigns and encourage them to champion the cause.*

Training and Education

49. It is clear that further training and education needs to be implemented across all levels of sport. We particularly see the need for this at grassroots sport level; an area where homophobia can appear to go unaddressed. In order to determine the best steps forwards, national governing bodies should undertake extensive research to determine the key causes of the issues. National governing bodies need to understand why homophobic abuse is so commonplace and why participation rates are so low in order to understand how best to tackle the problem. *In order best to work with grassroots clubs, national governing bodies should produce targeted guidance and training at these levels. We would encourage the introduction of a toolkit for clubs and recommend that national governing bodies partner with relevant organisations such as Stonewall in order to produce, targeted, sensitive and common sense advice.* As the largest and wealthiest governing body, the FA should take the lead on the implementation of further training programmes. The issue has not been addressed satisfactorily by the FA up to this point and immediate action is required to change the culture.

50. *Training should be available for all staff at all levels which should incorporate both educational as well as practical training.* We recognise that homophobic language is often prevalent within grassroots sports and at coaching level; educational programmes should make clear why this is not acceptable. Additionally, training should advise staff on how to both recognise and deal with homophobic abuse where it occurs. This should be available to all, incorporating coaches, match officials and stewards. *It is especially important that national governing bodies make clear to stewards that they will be*

supported when confronting and reporting homophobia. Should stewards face backlash from fans, this should be dealt with in the same way as abuse directed at players, with a zero-tolerance approach.

51. It should be made clear that match officials should have a duty to report and document any kind of abuse at all levels. This should not just apply to officials in the professional leagues who hear abuse from spectators but should filter down to youth level; for example, if officials hear homophobic terms used by parents.

52. *A zero-tolerance approach to the use of all homophobic language and behaviours should be implemented and standardised sanctions should be implemented across all sports. It appears that sanctions are all too often addressed at the discretion of the club or governing body involved. A tougher approach across the board would go some way towards sending a clear message that the issue will no longer be ignored.*

Conclusions and recommendations

1. We consider that the inclusion of Tyson Fury in the shortlist for BBC Sports Personality of the Year was symptomatic of homophobia not being taken seriously enough in sport. It provides an example of how homophobic abuse is allowed to pass unchallenged too often. (Paragraph 4)
2. We are very concerned that, despite the significant change in society's attitudes to homosexuality in the last 30 years, there is little reflection of this progress being seen in football, particularly in terms of LGB visibility. Indeed, it is often LGB supporters who provide the only LGB visibility at football stadia. (Paragraph 11)
3. *We also commend the Amateur Swimming Association for the work it does with LGB swimmers and the steps it is taking towards developing tailored toolkits in order to help operators best assist in the recent upsurge in transgender participation, as well as their support for "safe spaces" and gay-friendly swimming clubs. The ASA ran LGB roadshows to get people to engage with its audit in partnership with the Government Equalities Office steering group, Pride Sports, Ditch the Label, Transsexuals in Sport and Stonewall. We encourage other sporting bodies to follow examples such as these and initiate similar outreach programmes.* (Paragraph 19)
4. *We recommend that sport governing bodies—many of which have been doing good work in encouraging girls to take part in sport at school—extend their work in schools explicitly to address the problem of homophobia.* (Paragraph 23)
5. We have serious concerns over the effects of low participation among LGB youth on their mental and physical health and well-being and we note that, in the long-term, it is very likely that a number of sports have been robbed of talent by the fact that promising young players have not felt accepted or supported in the sport they play. It appears that young players and athletes sometimes feel that they have to make the active choice between either coming out or continuing to participate in their chosen sport. As a result, players and athletes either drop out of sport together or, as has been the case with some professional sportspeople, they wait until after retirement to come out. (Paragraph 24)
6. It is clear to us that the casual use of homophobic epithets and terms has a wide-ranging and damaging effect and we consider it very disappointing that a significant percentage of people consider anti-LGB language to be harmless. It should be treated in the same way as other offensive language, whether racist, sexist or denigrating any other group. (Paragraph 25)
7. Sports clubs are responsible for the wellbeing of their players, and it would be unacceptable for coaches and managers to allow homophobic language to be used without comment or redress, just as it would for racist behaviour to go without reprimand. People within football will know whether this insight applies to their club and should act accordingly to show that they take homophobia seriously. (Paragraph 27)

8. *Football clubs should take a tougher approach to incidents of homophobic abuse, issuing immediate bans. We are not advocating immediate lifetime bans. Instead, issuing bans of one to two years in the first instance would indicate clearly that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated.* (Paragraph 33)
9. *We believe that LGB-specific sessions within sport may be beneficial. We would also encourage all national governing bodies to promote the establishment and development of LGB-friendly clubs which are to be affiliated to the relevant governing body. This must be understood as a measure of encouraging inclusivity of all sports enthusiasts regardless of their sexual preference and by no means been seen as a move towards creating divisions between specific groups or members of society.* (Paragraph 35)
10. We welcome the increasing LGB visibility within sport and note that many sports, particularly rugby, have made significant progress in this respect. However, we feel that no sportsperson should feel under undue pressure or feel 'forced' to come out. Coming out is a personal and private decision which should not be determined by others. (Paragraph 38)
11. We regret that there is so little LGB visibility in football. We warmly support and encourage the first player, or group of players, who feel they are comfortable and confident enough to come out as we believe that they will make a valuable and significant contribution to football. (Paragraph 39)
12. The main corporate sponsors have a duty to assure sportspeople that they will not lose their sponsorship as a direct result of coming out. Major sponsors should come together to launch an initiative in the UK to make clear that, should any sportsperson wish to come out, they will have their support. (Paragraph 42)
13. *We recommend that national governing bodies commit funds and resources to supporting further and more visible interventions as part of the Rainbow Laces campaign. This should incorporate television and cinema advertisements, screens at football matches and outside advertising such as bus-stop advertisements. This must be a sustained effort over a significant period of time, rather than a short-term commitment.* (Paragraph 46)
14. *We believe that the FA, in particular, should encourage the participation of straight players in education programmes and campaigns and encourage them to champion the cause.* (Paragraph 48)
15. *In order best to work with grassroots clubs, national governing bodies should produce targeted guidance and training at these levels. We would encourage the introduction of a toolkit for clubs and recommend that national governing bodies partner with relevant organisations such as Stonewall in order to produce, targeted, sensitive and common sense advice. As the largest and wealthiest governing body, the FA should take the lead on the implementation of further training programmes. The issue has not been addressed satisfactorily by the FA up to this point and immediate action is required to change the culture.* (Paragraph 49)
16. *Training should be available for all staff at all levels which should incorporate both educational as well as practical training.* We recognise that homophobic language is often prevalent within grassroots sports and at coaching level; educational

programmes should make clear why this is not acceptable. Additionally, training should advise staff on how to both recognise and deal with homophobic abuse where it occurs. This should be available to all, incorporating coaches, match officials and stewards. *It is especially important that national governing bodies make clear to stewards that they will be supported when confronting and reporting homophobia. Should stewards face backlash from fans, this should be dealt with in the same way as abuse directed at players, with a zero-tolerance approach.* (Paragraph 50)

17. It should be made clear that match officials should have a duty to report and document any kind of abuse at all levels. This should not just apply to officials in the professional leagues who hear abuse from spectators but should filter down to youth level; for example, if officials hear homophobic terms used by parents. (Paragraph 51)
18. *A zero-tolerance approach to the use of all homophobic language and behaviours should be implemented and standardised sanctions should be implemented across all sports. It appears that sanctions are all too often addressed at the discretion of the club or governing body involved. A tougher approach across the board would go some way towards sending a clear message that the issue will no longer be ignored.* (Paragraph 52)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 7 February 2017

Members present:

Damian Collins, in the Chair

Andrew Bingham	Ian C. Lucas
Julie Elliott	Chris Matheson
Paul Farrelly	Jason McCartney
Nigel Huddleston	John Nicolson
Julian Knight	

Draft Report (*Homophobia in Sport*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 52 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 21 February at 10.00 am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 18 May 2016

Question number

Dr Jamie Cleland, Loughborough University, **Dr Mark McCormack**, Durham University, and **Professor Ian Rivers**, University of Strathclyde

[Q1–87](#)

Tuesday 8 November 2016

John Amaechi, former NBA player, **Tom Bosworth**, race-walker

[Q88–133](#)

Lianne Sanderson, footballer

[Q134–154](#)

Tuesday 13 December 2016

Nigel Owens, Rugby Union Referee

[Q155–174](#)

Paul Twocock, Director of Campaigns, Policy and Research, Stonewall, **Di Cunningham**, Proud Canaries, and **Jamie Hooper**, Equality and Diversity Programme Manager, Amateur Swimming Association

[Q175–192](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

HIS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Amateur Swimming Association ([HIS0029](#))
- 2 British Athletes Commission ([HIS0030](#))
- 3 British Horseracing Authority ([HIS0012](#))
- 4 British Universities and Colleges Sport ([HIS0019](#))
- 5 Department for Culture, Media and Sport ([HIS0038](#))
- 6 Dr Jamie Cleland ([HIS0023](#))
- 7 England and Wales Cricket Board ([HIS0018](#))
- 8 England Hockey ([HIS0027](#))
- 9 Equality Network ([HIS0008](#))
- 10 Football v Homophobia ([HIS0032](#))
- 11 Graces Cricket Club ([HIS0039](#))
- 12 Harry Stow ([HIS0002](#))
- 13 Independent British sport scholars at Universities of Winchester, Loughborough, Southampton Solent and Worcester ([HIS0011](#))
- 14 Jonathan Emmett ([HIS0003](#))
- 15 Just A Ball Game? ([HIS0004](#))
- 16 Kick It Out ([HIS0007](#))
- 17 Lawn Tennis Association ([HIS0024](#))
- 18 LEAP Sports Scotland ([HIS0025](#))
- 19 London Royals Hockey Club ([HIS0016](#))
- 20 Ms Kendra Hourd ([HIS0001](#))
- 21 Premier League ([HIS0036](#))
- 22 Pride in Football ([HIS0026](#))
- 23 Professional Footballers Association ([HIS0015](#))
- 24 Proud Canaries ([HIS0021](#))
- 25 Rugby Football League ([HIS0040](#))
- 26 Rugby Football Union ([HIS0014](#))
- 27 Sport Allies ([HIS0020](#))
- 28 Sport and Recreation Alliance ([HIS0010](#))
- 29 Sport England ([HIS0017](#))
- 30 Sport Wales ([HIS0009](#))
- 31 Stonewall ([HIS0031](#))
- 32 Sydney Convicts Rugby Union Club and Out on the Fields ([HIS0005](#))
- 33 The FA, Premier League, Football League, LMA, PFA and PGMOL and RA ([HIS0035](#))

- 34 The Football Association ([HIS0034](#))
- 35 The Football League ([HIS0028](#))
- 36 The Youth Sport Trust ([HIS0006](#))
- 37 Trade Union Congress ([HIS0037](#))
- 38 UK Sport and English Institute of Sport ([HIS0033](#))
- 39 University of Leicester, Trinity College Dublin and Ulster University ([HIS0022](#))
- 40 Volleyball England ([HIS0013](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

First Report	BBC Charter Review	HC 398
Second Report	Appointment of the Information Commissioner	HC 990
First Special Report	Tourism: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 382
Second Special Report	Society Lotteries: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 415

Session 2016–17

First Report	Cyber Security: Protection of Personal Data Online	HC 148 (HC 716 HC 763)
Second Report	Establishing world-class connectivity throughout the UK	HC 147 (HC 714)
Third Report	BBC White Paper and related issues	HC 150 (HC 715)
Fourth Report	Countries of Culture: Funding and support for the arts outside London	HC 114
Fifth Report	Accessibility of Sports Stadia	HC 62
Sixth Report	Pre-appointment hearing for the Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the BBC	HC 814
First Special Report	BBC White Paper and related issues: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016–17	HC 715
Second Special Report	Establishing world-class connectivity throughout the UK: Responses to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2016–17	HC 714
Third Special Report	Cyber Security: Protection of Personal Data Online: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2016–17	HC 716
Fourth Special Report	Cyber Security: Protection of Personal Data Online: Information Commissioner's Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2016–17	HC 763