

Update on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Equality

“Over the last few years the Government has secured significant improvements in the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Old laws that discriminated against LGB people have been repealed or amended and we have sought to ensure that people are not treated unfairly because of their sexual orientation. But what does this mean in practice?

Here is a summary of recent developments, that I hope you will find useful.”

Jacqui Smith MP

Deputy Minister for Women and Equality

- The Government’s **Civil Partnership Bill** is progressing through Parliament, having been introduced into the House of Lords on 30 March 2004. The Bill would allow same-sex couples to gain formal legal recognition of their relationships, if they choose to do so.
www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/lgbt/partnership.htm
- In May 2004, the DTI published a White Paper outlining plans to create a single Commission for Equality and Human Rights. This body will, for the first time, provide institutional support for new laws outlawing workplace and vocational training discrimination on grounds of religion & belief, sexual orientation and – in time – age.
www.dti.gov.uk/access/equalitywhitepaper.pdf/
- The **Sexual Offences Act 2003** ensures that sexual offences laws no longer discriminate against LGB people.
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/sentencing/sexualoffencesbill
- In March 2004 Patricia Hewitt MP, Minister for Women, announced at the Stonewall conference “Ending Discrimination in Sexual Orientation in Employment” that Government departments had committed to examine their policies to **tackle homophobia**.

- When the **Adoption and Children Act 2002** is fully implemented, same-sex couples will be able to apply to adopt a child jointly in England and Wales.
www.children.doh.gov.uk/adoption/adoptionact.htm
- The **Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003** came into force in December 2003. Discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of sexual orientation is now outlawed and protection against harassment at work is provided for the first time ever.
www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality/
- In November 2003 the **Criminal Justice Bill 2003** extended the statutory duty on sentencers to increase sentences for offences aggravated by the victim's sexual orientation.
www.cjsonline.gov.uk/news/2003/november/Criminal_Justice_Act_Nov_2003_A-Z.html
- **Section 28**, an irrelevant and deeply offensive piece of legislation which stigmatised gay lifestyles, was finally repealed in England and Wales in November 2003.
www.number10.gov.uk/output/page4503.asp
- From April 2003, the right to two weeks paid paternity leave was fully introduced following the provisions in the **Employment Act 2002**. This is available to a parent, including a same-sex partner, who has responsibility for the upbringing of the child. www.dti.gov.uk/er/employ/. The right for parents of young children to request a flexible working pattern was also introduced. Same-sex partners of a biological parent can now request to work flexibly if they have responsibility for the child's upbringing.
www.dti.gov.uk/er/individual/flexible-pl516.htm
- The **Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme** was revised to include LGB partners in 2001. Previous inequalities in the Scheme were highlighted in the Soho bombing in 1999 where it became clear that eligibility was denied to same-sex partners.
www.cicap.gov.uk/pdf/crim_inj_comp2001.pdf
- In January 2001 the **Sexual Offences Amendment Act 2000** reduced the age of consent for gay men to 16.
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/hoc4600.html
- **Immigration rules** have been changed to allow people in long term relationships who are unable to marry, including same-sex couples, the right to remain with a person present and settled in the UK.
www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?PageId=1438
- The Foreign and Commonwealth Office launched the 'Know Before You Go' campaign which includes information for British **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) travellers** abroad.
www.fco.gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo

The Government is working towards ensuring a fair society for LGB people.

That work is continuing both through legislation and in the wider culture, and it is important for people to know what their legal rights and responsibilities are.

To find out more about what the Government is doing in the LGB equality field visit:
www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk

