

Equal Rights for Lesbians and Gays in Education



Respect diversity!

If between five and ten percent of all people are homosexual, then that means every class potentially contains one or two lesbian or gay students. The pressure to be “normal”, i.e. to be heterosexual, is enormous. The important goal in schools, however, should be respect for diversity, reflection on one’s own lifestyle and one’s own prejudices. Schools therefore require competence at counselling young people in all life situations.

The GEW, the German Education Union, supports the goal that children and young people should not be left alone in their difficult search for identity. It demands that lesbians and gays be mentioned and represented in a positive way in the schoolbooks for all subjects and stages. A pedagogy of diversity that respects lesbian and gay lifestyles must be anchored in educational curricula and in teacher training and in-service training.

Coming out at the workplace

Real equality for lesbians and gays in society is still a long way off. Prejudices against same-sex lifestyles and homosexuals’ fear of stigmatisation influence the atmosphere and interaction at the workplace. Lesbians and gays fear being excluded at the workplace after coming out. They are afraid of disadvantages whose connection with sexual orientation is seldom verifiable. However, controlling information about one’s lifestyle leads to a significant loss of energy in a relatively strenuous profession.

Basically, individuals have to decide for themselves whether they want to come out at the workplace or not and under which circumstances and to whom they wish to disclose their lifestyle. People who are open about their sexual identity can integrate this into their professional activity, extend their own ability to act and increase their authority. Openly lesbian or gay teachers can serve as encouraging role models for young people with a same-sex orientation.

The GEW encourages and supports colleagues in coming out, mediates contacts in the professional environment and provides protection against discrimination.

Union work for lesbians and gays

If lesbians and gays need support at the workplace, they can turn to staff representatives and equal opportunities officers at their schools. The GEW provides lesbians and gays with guidance and support during teacher training and on all employment issues, whether these involve appointments, transfers or promotions. Furthermore, GEW legal protection offices are available as points of contact for GEW members.

In its bodies and subdivisions, the GEW pledges to support lesbian and gay teachers within the GEW in their struggle for equal rights at the workplace and in society. At a political level, the GEW influences equal opportunities and antidiscrimination policy – from the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) and legislation on civil partnerships to collective bargaining policy.

Lesbian and gay teachers are active in GEW working groups. Their subjects and key areas are

- coming out at the workplace;
- support for colleagues facing discrimination through advice and union legal protection;
- drafting of teaching and educational material;
- arrangement of further education and conferences for lesbians and gays;
- training programmes for staff representatives, e.g. on the conditions for achieving a non-discriminatory working climate;
- gender and diversity training courses, also on dealing with different sexual orientations;
- education policy initiatives for progressive sex education guidelines and general curricula in which homosexuality is portrayed as a positive lifestyle on an equal footing with heterosexuality;
- teaching materials that reflect the present acceptance of diverse lifestyles;
- anchoring the subject of homosexuality in teacher training and in-service training.

Contact

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