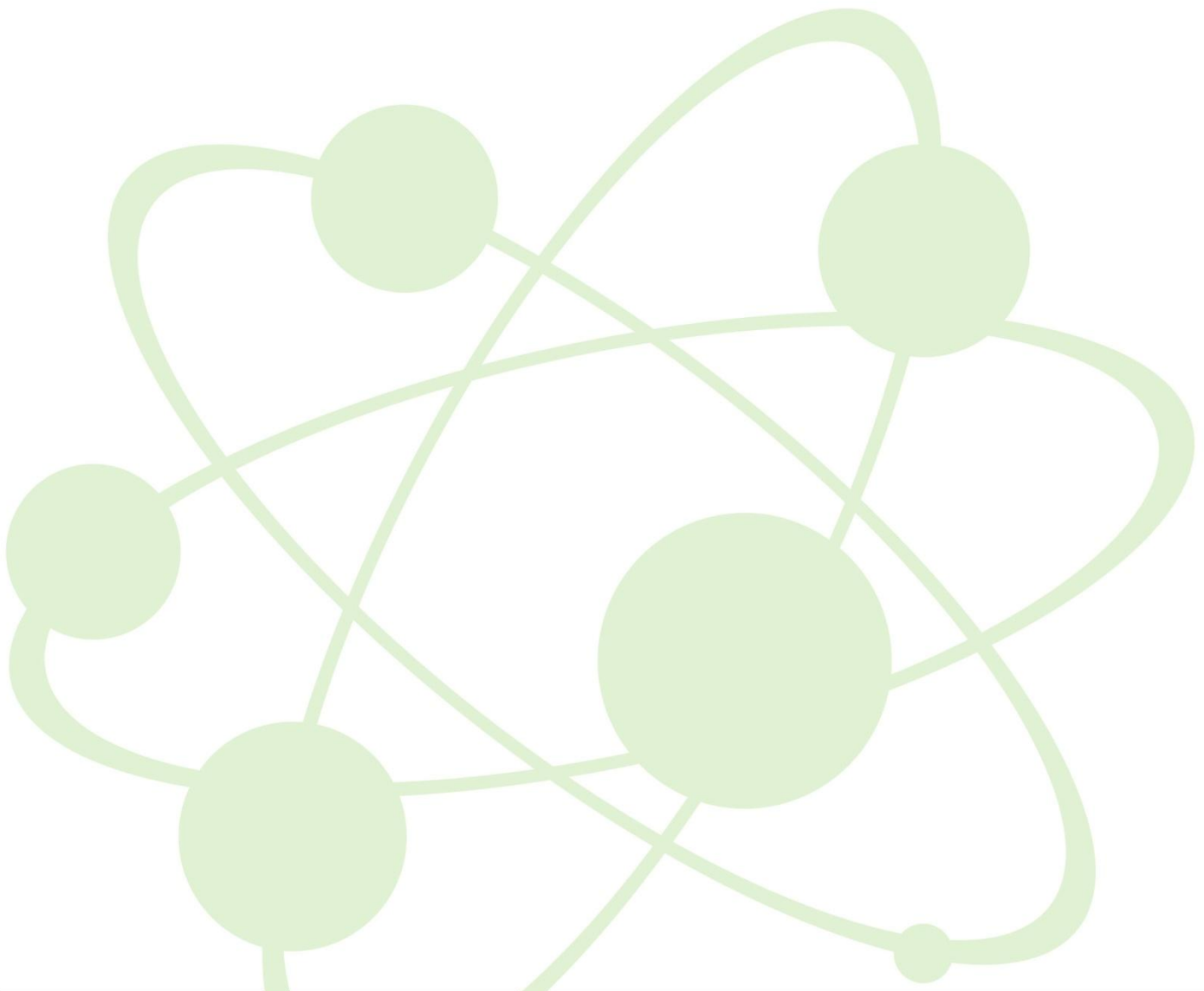




The Law Society

Mapping and evaluating the formal and informal lesbian, gay and bisexual networks in the legal profession in England

Mayur Suresh



Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the people who agreed to be interviewed as a part of this project and who generously offered their time and insights into their experiences of setting up and being a part of LGB networks.

I would also like to extend my deepest thanks to Les Moran for his many ideas, thoughts and feedback at various key stages of this project.

Thanks are also due to Aisha Dass at the Law Society and other members of the Law Society's LGB Steering Committee for their feedback on the questionnaires and on drafts of this report.

Table of Contents

Executive summary.....	5
Introduction	11
Previous research into the professional lives of LGB solicitors in England and Wales	11
The role of networks	12
Research questions	14
Methodology	14
Formal intra-firm networks	17
Beginnings.....	17
When & how	17
Why.....	18
Support from the firm	20
General support.....	21
Budget	21
Activities and role of the network	21
Pastoral role.....	22
Symbolic role.....	22
Community.....	22
Networking opportunities for LGBT staff.....	23
Educational	23
Support for LGBT staff	24
Mentoring.....	25
External and business development role	26
Business development for the firm.	26
Diversity training for other organisations, firms and clients	26
Charity support.....	27
Mentoring university students.....	27
Membership	28
Straight allies.....	29
Structure	31
Communicating to the firm	32
Email lists.....	32
On induction day	33
Intranet webpage	33
Intrafirm newsletter.....	34
Office environment.....	34
Challenges.....	34
People who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual but not part of the network	35
Women’s membership.....	35
Transgender membership	36
Maintaining enthusiasm.....	37
Coordinating across offices within the firm	37
Inter-firm and informal LGBT networks	39
Inter-firm and informal intra-firm networks.....	39
The informal network within the firm	39
The interfirm network.....	39
Pooling resources and activities.....	40

Informal networks.....	41
Early Careers	42
Culture of the firm	42
Isolation and homophobia.....	43
Role for the Law Society.....	45
Conclusions and avenues for further research	47
References.....	50
Appendix 1: questionnaire and checklist for the interviews	51
Appendix 2: draft questionnaire for further (quantitative) research into LGB networks	53

Executive summary

Aims

The Law Society commissioned research to :

- 1) identify the formal and informal LGB networks that exist within law firms;
- 2) map out what roles these networks play within the firms; and
- 3) identify areas in which the Law Society might provide support to LGB solicitors and networks.

Methodology

A total of 21 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted across 21 law firms during March and April 2014. The participating firms were located predominantly in London (13 out of the 21 firms, of which 11 described themselves as 'City' firms); the remaining firms were located in either the Northwest, Midlands or Southwest of England, and included smaller and medium-sized firms.

Eighteen of the interviewees were individuals who ran or were active members of a LGB network at their firm; the remaining interviewees were Human Resource (HR) personnel who managed LGB networks.

Interviewees were recruited through a call for participation to those firms which had signed up to the Law Society's Diversity and Inclusion Charter – thus it could be assumed that there would be some interest in this work and an increased likelihood that these firms would have an LGB network in place. Whilst this held value in the aims of this research to understand the role and form of these networks, this approach neglected to help explain the counter position of why some firms did not have LGB networks.

Findings

The networks

Of the 21 firms participating in this study, 16 had internal LGB networks – all but three were based in London.

Where firms were smaller in size and/or only had a handful of known LGB employees, the approach was to create inter-firm networks across a number of offices.

Motivations to set up LGB networks included:

- Building a sense of community within the firm.
- Utilising trends toward social media networks such as Yammer and Facebook
- Complying with firm diversity policies and employee well-being
- Generating business development opportunities for the firm; a way to meet the diversity demands of clients or to connect with clients who may be part of other professional LGB networks.

Theoretically, the networks envisaged themselves as educating others about LGB lives, providing a mentoring scheme and having some informal role in supporting targets of this harassment, bullying or discrimination. In reality the extent to which these activities were pursued and/or needed was much less or lower than expected.

Membership

Criteria for joining the network were designed to accommodate the privacy and comfort of LGB members who might not be out in the wider work place; consequently, some networks were open to only LGB-identified staff, others to all employees (LGB and straight) and others still pursued a dual identity through a mix of public and private communications.

One firm attempted to resolve membership issues by having two different email groups: one that was closed and private, where individuals would be bcc'd, and a second that was an open public list. This distinction in itself raises some serious questions about the extent to which LGB networks are a fully integrated part of the firm culture.

One interviewee described the LGB network as a way to root out and informally manage homophobic behaviours at the firm; the extent to which this HR-assumed regulatory role put off potential members is not clear.

The diversity of a firm's LGB employee population was not reflected in membership of its LGB network. Networks felt that non-fee-earning and support staff (typically women) were under-represented in their memberships. Whilst some networks had lesbian and bisexual women members, the majority of participants were gay men. This reinforces previous research where lesbians felt they got nothing from networks stratified on the basis of gender and/or sexual orientation; instead they sought groups based on common hobbies/interests, areas of practice or career progression.

Trans and straight members

Whilst most of the firms included transgender in their 'LGBT network' title, none of the networks reported trans members. Two firms were aware of transgender employees, but these individuals were not active in the network. And this raises questions around whether trans individuals get anything from an essentially LGB network? It also prompts a call to better understand what the needs of trans employees actually are and broaches broader questions as to the function and form of diversity networks in firms; are LGB networks informally viewed as social clubs for gay men?

'Straight allies', heterosexual individuals who are members of the LGB network and/or attend LGB events, are promoted as essential to making the workplace more inclusive and welcoming to LGB people. However, the fact of having heterosexual members was described by another interviewee as a way to obscure sexual orientation and to protect the identity of LGB individuals who are not out, and thus who might pass as a straight ally. This is another indicator that LGB networks are still somewhat closeted despite having an apparent visibility at the firm.

For another interviewee, welcoming 'straight allies' did not fit with the aims of their network; for this individual there was an implied tension that if someone did not join as a straight ally this meant they might be assumed to be a 'straight enemy'.

Visibility

The existence of an LGB network was seen as a symbolic marker of how open a firm was to LGB staff and the extent to which the firm's culture embraced diversity. However, more than one interviewee reported that the LGB network met off-site and communicated via private web pages or confidential helplines to protect those who chose not to be out at work.

LGB networks were most likely to be populated by individuals who were already out at the firm; interviewees did not recount instances where an individual outed his/herself in order to join the network. It remains questionable the extent to which private mailboxes and off-site social events could sufficiently mitigate employee concerns, especially if employees questioned the genuine commitment of the firm to these types of diversity networks (and particularly if the feeling was that it was driven by clients and PR, rather than by employee need)

One of the key ways in which networks attempted to make their offices more LGB friendly was to increase visible signs of openness. Several of the networks said that they made sure posters went up in common office spaces such as cafeterias or elevators. Others increased visibility by having rainbow-themed mugs or mousepads. Yet interviewees did acknowledge that it was a fine line between having a visible presence and turning a serious message into a gimmick.

Support and 'success'

Where firms had active LGB networks these were generally well supported by the firm in terms of facilitating office space, catering, PR resources and, in some cases, the ability of members to use some of their billable hours to undertake network events; lack of budget to run the network was not a consideration for any of the firms.

The success of the network was judged by how well events were attended and how actively known LGB employees associated with the network. For some interviewees, having an active LGB network was a crucial line of support for individuals at the firm. Others acknowledged that there were LGB employees who did not feel they needed the network - in the current age of social media and online networking this is less of a surprise (and in-firm networks perhaps less of a lifeline) than might have been the case five or ten years ago.

The biggest challenges for those running LGB networks were expressed as: (i) time, especially with dwindling numbers volunteering to help with the planning and arrangement of events; and (ii) attracting out LGB employees to join; those who were not part of the LGB network cited a number of reasons, including time, a lack of interest in the types of events offered and an assertion that their sexual orientation was not a part of their work life.

Whilst some LGB networks felt that the true measure of their success would be that they were no longer needed, others who felt the network was more about the public face of the firm and client appeal than needs of employees felt it would endure if only in name.

Role for Law Society

The vast majority of individuals interviewed for this project had no contact with the Law Society, and several were not aware that their firm had signed up to the Law Society's Diversity and Inclusion Charter.

All interviewees agreed that the Law Society had a role in promoting LGB equality and diversity, and especially amongst smaller law firms, and those outside of major cities.

Potential activities for the Law Society were suggested as:

- facilitate road shows around the country to start discussions about setting up local LGB networks;
- make available training and advice for firms that want to set up their own networks
- supporting existing and future LGB networks
- run LGB events outside of London, especially for smaller firms which may not have their own network
- organise Law Society branded LGB events, seminars and conferences about LGB topics/working lives.

Future research

Future research needs to address perceptions of LGB networks beyond those individuals who manage or are active members of such networks, as featured in this report.

Further, to explore other means of support and communication amongst LGB professionals; platforms for interaction and support outside of the immediate employer context (perhaps made possible by social media/technology) and the extent to which these other avenues replace the need for law firm networks.

The findings of this report draw attention to wider issues around diversity networks and the role these networks play in firms, any of which would merit from in-depth investigation; in particular asking questions around issues of visibility, genuine integration into firm culture, the role of networks in a firm's PR strategy and its interaction with clients.

Introduction

Creating lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) networks is seen an essential part of improving equality and diversity in the solicitors' profession more generally and within law firms in particular. According to Stonewall:

Establishing a lesbian and gay network group will make your gay staff a visible element of your workforce. It will provide a forum for unique networking opportunities and a means of peer support between gay staff. It will also enable you, as an employer, to engage directly with the needs of gay staff and to recognise which policies may impact on lesbian and gay employees, and what changes can be made to improve staff experiences.¹

The case for professional networks having already been made out, this study, commissioned by the Law Society, seeks to identify the formal and informal LGB networks that exist within law firms, to map out what roles they play within law firms, and to identify areas in which the Law Society can provide support to LGB solicitors.

Previous research into the professional lives of LGB solicitors in England and Wales

In 2006, the Law Society published an “exploratory study on the career experiences of gay and lesbian solicitors”². This study (hereafter, the Chittenden Report) was based on in-depth interviews conducted with 15 gay and 10 lesbian solicitors in London, the Southwest and the Northwest of England.

This was followed by a joint report in 2010 by the Law Society and the Interlaw Diversity forum for LGBT Networks in 2009³ (hereafter, the 2010 Report). The anonymous self-completed survey was conducted online (accessible via links from the Law Society’s website and newsletter) with over 400 respondents. The survey was not restricted to solicitors and the respondents included those working across the legal profession generally. The questions contained in the survey were developed through the use of focus groups conducted by the Law Society and the Interlaw Diversity Forum.

Both these reports focus on questions of discrimination at the work place, issues confronting LGB lawyers on whether to be out at the work place, and, to an extent,

¹ Cowan: 2005, at page 1.

² Chittenden: 2006, at page 5.

³ The Law Society: 2010.

address the question of networks and sources of support. The Chittenden and 2010 surveys map divergences in answers by respondents along several axes, including:

- a) Age: Younger respondents tended to be more open about their sexual orientation than their older colleagues.
- b) The size of the firm or organisation in which the respondent was employed was perceived as having an impact on how receptive they were to LGB issues. However opinion was divided on whether larger organisations were better than smaller ones. Some of the respondents in the 2010 report felt that large firms could do more than smaller firms.⁴ However one respondent in the Chittenden Report alluded to the fact that working in a large firm or organisation may be difficult⁵ while elsewhere the report notes that “*For some participants there remained a strong belief that discrimination was rife, perhaps less so in smaller practices or the employed sector, but certainly in some city firms*”⁶. However, according to the *Diversity and Inclusion Charter: Annual Review 2012* firm size does not appear as a significant factor in success in advancing diversity and inclusion more generally.⁷
- c) Career progression: the respondents tended to come out only after they felt more secure in their employment.
- d) Geographical location: the Chittenden Report makes the point that those working in large cities and in cities which had a large LGB community were more likely to be out than solicitors in rural locations.⁸

The role of networks

The 2010 report notes that 37.6% of the respondents said that there was an LGB network at the firm/organisation where they worked. Of these respondents, 76% actively participated in their networks,⁹ indicating that where networks exist there may be high participation amongst LGB persons in that firm/organisation. Most of the people who responded that they did not participate in the networks indicated that the lack of time was the predominant factor in not participating.¹⁰ Participants in this survey indicated that while larger organisations may have active networks,

⁴ The Law Society: 2010, pages 10, 11.

⁵ Chittenden: 2006, at page 20.

⁶ Chittenden: 2006, at page 29.

⁷ The Law Society: 2013, at page 6.

⁸ Chittenden: 2006, at page 37.

⁹ The Law Society: 2010, at page 19.

¹⁰ The Law Society: 2010, at page 20.

individuals in smaller or medium-size firms grew into more informal networks of support and information.

The Law Society has also commissioned an unpublished study on LGB solicitor's networks that are independent of firms and inter-firm networks.¹¹ This study which was based on interviews with people who ran these networks, focussed on the role of these networks, what forms of support they provided to LGB solicitors and how they compared with LGB networks in other professional areas such as accountancy and business consulting. The report focussed on several regional LGB inter-firm networks namely:

- Interlaw Diversity Forum;
- BYlaw;
- LegalBest;
- GEL (Gay Employment Lawyers);
- GLAM (Gay and Lesbian Lawyers around Manchester).

Further, this previous report also evaluated the role of general professional LGB networks, which solicitors could be a part of namely:

- The White Collar Club in Leeds;
- LIONS, both in Bristol and in London.

This previous report also sought to evaluate the role of LGB networks as compared to other professional networks namely:

- GLEE@PwC, the LGB run by Price Waterhouse Coopers;
- BLAGG, the LGB network for barristers.

The report highlighted the lack of LGB networks or networking opportunities for LGB lawyers outside of London and also identified several areas in which the Law Society could take the initiative.

While the Chittenden Report did not set out to specifically collect information about perceptions of the Law Society, it offered insights into the role of the Law Society and other networks. For the solicitors interviewed in this survey, the Law Society did not feature prominently in their professional lives.¹² The group that was most cited after the Law Society was the Lesbian and Gay Lawyers Association (LAGLA). While some of the respondents stated that LAGLA provided valued support,¹³ opinion was

¹¹ Schirato: 2013.

¹² Chittenden: 2006, at page 63.

¹³ Chittenden: 2006, at pages 42, 64.

divided on whether LAGLA should be more closely associated with the Law Society.¹⁴ The report further notes, however, that there was near unanimity in that the Law Society ought to have a group for LGB solicitors.¹⁵

The Report notes that several themes emerged regarding the role that ought to be played by a LGB group in the Law Society:

- 1) To provide a forum to share career advice and experiences.
- 2) To provide support to solicitors who were currently not out at their firm or in a homophobic environment.
- 3) To lobby on relevant law reform issues.
- 4) To afford gay and lesbian solicitors an official voice on gay and lesbian issues.
- 5) To provide an arena for social events; and
- 6) To provide gay and lesbian solicitors with an opportunity to proudly stand up and be identified as such.¹⁶

Research questions

Thus far, there has been no research into how and why intra-firm LGB networks were formed, what role LGB networks play within firms or their continuing relevance. Further, given the existence of intra-firm, inter-firm and professional lawyers' networks, it was unclear what role the Law Society should play. This study is aimed at mapping the LGB networks that exist within firms, and to get a sense of why and how they were created and what role they play in the lives of LGB solicitors. This study is aimed at answering the following research questions:

- 1) When, how and why were formal LGB networks created within law firms?
- 2) What are the activities of the LGB networks in the law firms?
- 3) What support do LGB members of law firms derive from formal and informal networks?
- 4) Given that there are professional networks, what is the ideal role for the Law Society in the lives of LGB solicitors?

Methodology

A total of 21 qualitative, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted for this report. They were conducted between 24/03/2014 and 25/04/2014. The shortest interview was about 50 minutes while the longest lasted for about two hours. 18 of

¹⁴ Chittenden: 2006, at page 64.

¹⁵ Chittenden: 2006, at page 65.

¹⁶ Chittenden: 2010, at page 66.

the interviews were conducted with members of the firm (fee earners or non-fee earners) who ran or were active members of these networks, while the remaining 3 were conducted with the firms' human resource (HR) personnel who managed the networks.

The first part of this report, dealing with formal intra-firm networks, is based on 16 interviews solicitors and human resource personnel who manage and coordinate formal LGB networks with firms. 13 of these firms are based in London and 11 describe themselves as being big city firms, and 2 of them identified themselves as medium sized firms. The remaining three firms are headquartered in cities in the southwest, and northwest of England and in the Midlands.

The second part of the report is based on similar interviews with smaller firms who had informal networks internally, and were part of inter-firm networks. Two of these firms were based in London, while the third was based in the Southwest. Additionally, this part examines interviews with women solicitors who were partners in their firms – one based in a city in the Northeast and the other on a London high street.

Appendix 1 contains the questionnaire that I administered to each of the respondents.

Interviewees were recruited through a call for participation sent out by the Law Society to the firms who were signatories to the Law Society's Diversity and Inclusion Charter. As the project was initially conceived, it was hoped that I could choose from a diverse cross-section of firms. However, only 24 firms replied to this initial email.¹⁷ The scale of initial responses made it possible to interview most of the firms that responded.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants were assured of their own and their firms' anonymity for their participation in this study. Data storage was also designed to preserve anonymity. The names of the firms and the interviewees have not been revealed and the excerpts from their interviews presented in this report have been edited so as to preserve their anonymity.

¹⁷ While no firm conclusions can be drawn from this lack of response, this could either indicate that there no formal networks in these firms, or that they had no time to participate in the study, or had simply missed the emails.

The project initially included a second stage: online, self-completed questionnaire to be targeted at LGBT solicitors. The Law Society decided not to proceed with this phase of the research due to a paucity of time.

The conclusions and recommendations in this study are presented with the limitations of the same in mind. Future research is needed to move beyond these limitations and the conclusion to this report suggests avenues that this research may take.

Formal intra-firm networks

Of the 21 firms surveyed in this report, 16 firms had created internal LGB networks. This section of the report focuses on the experience of these 16 firms; All but 3 of these firms are located in London, with one each located in the Southwest, Northwest, and in the Midlands. Of the 13 firms based in London, 2 of them identified themselves as medium sized firms.

This part of the report examines data on when, how and why these networks came into being. It also offers a snapshot of their present activities and purpose.

Beginnings

When & how

All of the firms interviewed began their formal networks after 2006. There is a strong indication from many of the interviews that the networks were set up in response to Stonewall's Work Place Equality Index (WEI) launched in 2005. While some of the firms did not participate in the WEI process, it was clear that the Stonewall index had created a milieu in which these networks could be created. Many of the networks were initiated or encouraged by the firm's HR and/or diversity managers.

It began in 2007 and I think it was one of the very first networks for law firms in the UK and it was launched partly.. [because] I think there was a sort of trend at the time where people were looking at women in business and women's networks... and our Managing Partner... thought that we should be looking at diversity more generally in the firm and that wasn't necessarily LGBT at the time. He brought on a diversity manager who started looking at diversity... and very quickly we had an inaugural sort of launch of the network with a big sort of fanfare...

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

To be brutally honest, the network was started because the HR team said to us, would you like to set up a network; it hadn't occurred to me specifically but the more we thought about it, then we had this talk from InterLaw and people were saying that they wanted a local inter-law firm network. And then we thought, if there's a need for something in-firm, then that's something we should do.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

So in 2007 we set up the network. We had some openly gay partners who, alongside our head of diversity at that time, chose to form an LGBT network. We had a daily email alert that goes out to the whole office and we just advertised on that alert that we would be holding our first LGBT network meeting offsite in a location close to the office, particularly for those who aren't out at work and who maybe comfortable coming along if it were an offsite event and we held that event. It was an after-work event and it attracted quite small numbers. We had eight people turn up though we had visions of twenty-thirty people.

(Interview no. 13, male, city firm)

In a smaller number of instances, the network was begun at the initiative of LGB people within law firms.

At that point in 2007, there was a partner who was out in one of our departments, who happened to have some social event and a gay solicitor within his group got talking to him and they thought let's go for a drink and let's talk about it. So they gathered the known out gay people to say, do you want to get together. So that's how it started.

(Interview no. 9, female, city firm)

We're a large firm and based in many geographical locations (in England). So because it's difficult to bring people together, the firm invested in a social media tool called Yammer – it's a professional version of Facebook – and everyone in the firm is signed up to Yammer. So people in different offices can communicate a lot easier. Once Yammer got started I got the idea of starting an LGBT network. The first step was set up the Yammer page. It's just like Facebook but we set it as private just in case people weren't out at work and then people could request to join. All you have to do is press join and then you'll join the network.

(Interview no. 22, male, Northwest, large firm)

Why

There were several different reasons that were offered as motivations to start the networks:

- Building a sense of community with in the firm.
- Business development opportunities for the firm.
- Feedback to the firm on policies and employee well-being.

Community

One of the primary points of enthusiasm for the networks was the ability of LGB people to know the other LGB people were in the firm, to meet, socialise, and to build friendships. The networks not only played an instrumental function in that they helped LGBT staff get to know one another, but also played an important symbolic role. The existence of the network itself was seen as a marker of how open a firm was to LGBT staff.

I think primarily just because people wanted to get to know who the other gay people were in the firm... the main driver I believe is people just wanting to network within the firm.

I think there is if you are possibly coming into the firm and want to know whether it's okay to be openly gay in this sort of firm, and if you're a person who has been openly gay, then the role of the network is more one of supporting people and giving them benefit of seeing someone who's been openly gay in the law firm for the past 20 years.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

Before we got together (in the network) I would say the situation was, you tended to know who the other out gay people were, but you didn't know them. And... it's a bit embarrassing just going up to somebody and saying "hi, I know you're in the club. Shall we be friends?" You got no natural form... but if there's an environment where you're going in a gang, through a group, then you get to know them and then you do become friends

(Interview no. 9, female, city firm)

So there's the peer support role. The fact that people with a similar life experience can get together and support each other. And that to me is an important function that manifests itself in providing people with contact details is the first step. So knowing who other LGBT people are in the firm.

(Interview no. 5, male, city firm)

While none of the people interviewed stated that they began the network in response to homophobic harassment or bullying, the creation of the network was seen as an important way to look into the everyday lives of their members to see whether there were any such issues, and to create an informal mechanism to deal with these issues.

Initially I said what's the point of this, what's the reasoning? And the HR director was very persuasive and she said that it's all very well that you've managed to make partner and have had success without too much stress about your sexuality but for other people they may not face the same situation... The HR managers view was that we should have the ability to be known members of the network and therefore available to other people if there had been any kind of bullying or that kind of thing... The idea was also that people should be available when contacted and if anybody wanted somebody to talk to that by having an openly gay person, people would know who to contact. It was about building a community, making a safe space.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

The creation of a network was also important in helping LGB solicitors to figure out how far they can climb up the professional ladder, and how much of an impediment being queer might be for their careers.

I set up the network because... I wanted to see how LGBT friendly the firm was and for personal development I wanted to see how people become senior within the firm and got to partner level who identify as LGBT. So it was really reassuring when you saw that there were loads of partners that had, and everyone was very encouraging.

(Interview no. 22, male, Northwest, large firm)

Business development for the firm

Networks are also seen as helping build relationships with clients. Not only were clients seen to value firms who valued diversity, but the creation of LGB networks was seen as a way to forge contacts with clients who may have LGB networks of their own.

(Also) the firm might perceive it (from the) client's angle. Clients want to work with people who share the same goals and share the same... open-mindedness as them, and who can deliver without being... fettered by any sort of discrimination or discomfort... Clients expect you to be running a firm where you have a diverse staff and diverse population.

It's also about business need... I think one of the initial drivers back in 2007 was that we as a firm take on a lot of work from public bodies, from government and in government (when pitching for work)... you had to include information about diversity policies...

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

There's the client development aspect to the network. More and more, it's about working with LGBT-identifying and LGBT-friendly clients of the firm. And I guess there's the public aspect of it. The network is the public LGBT face of the firm.

(Interview no. 5, female, city firm)

Advising on firm policies

The network is also seen as having an important functional role on making firm policies more LGB friendly and as a way of testing how comfortable LGB staff were at their work place.

The other driver was from HR, to advise on policies. So at the time (we advised on) a harassment and bullying policy and a paternity policy.

(Interview no. 20, Southwest, male, large law firm).

I think there was a sense that we weren't doing enough to support issues that had come up. And I don't necessarily mean discrimination or anything really serious. But people who'd raised concerns about policies, or wanting to make sure that things were inclusive.

At that time you really didn't have people standing up who didn't identify. And it was the same with the women's network. You really didn't have men standing up saying we needed more women partners. It wasn't so much of a conversation as it is now. So the need was there to support and the need was there for the firm to do something, and we would be seen to be visibly doing something... the main driver for the network was making this place a better place to work if you were LGBT.

(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

Support from the firm

The respondents suggested that the networks received a range of support from the firm. All of the networks were encouraged and promoted by the firm. The firms provided a range of general support – such as the use of office space, and other services (such as catering, PR resources) to the networks for their activities. Additionally, in some instances, members of the network could use some of their chargeable target hours to do network events.

General support

We have buy-in from very senior partners, we have a co-sponsor who is a straight man, and our diversity partner is very engaged in what we are doing as a LGBT network.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

The Central services, Values teams and Diversity team provide us support in ways that they can. There's also the communications and PR teams, so we've written articles that have gone externally. I've done some work on LGBT education issues with teachers and they help us with that. And we have a PR agency that we're allowed to use for any of the things that we want to run.

(Interview no. 22, male, large North-west firm)

Budget

The most substantive form of support that networks did receive was in the form of a budget. None of the networks cited the lack of funds as an issue, and indicated that funding was not an impediment.

All of the firms had a central pool of money meant for diversity networks. In theory each of these networks had an equal share of this money.

In practice, several of the respondents said that the LGBT networks were by far the most active networks and ended up spending more money than other networks. In several instances, the respondents stated that there was more money than could be utilised and that while the HR manager were keen that the money be spent, the network could not find the time to use it.

The networks get a fairly substantive budget. We're able to have a budget that allows us to run a significant and expensive summer party, but also a number of significant events through that year

(Interview no. 14, London)

We get finance for the initiatives that we want to do, so in terms of Stonewall events that we put up, we host and we cater for them. For the one we did before Christmas we got a flyer and an invitation and made from an external marketing company. And they were paying for all that above the basics.

When we've gone to meet different people... say in other cities in the UK, they'll pay for...transport, etc. So to finance there's a budget that we tap into.

(Interview no. 22, male, large Northwest firm)

Activities and role of the network

The respondents emphasised that their networks had an important role to play in the life of the firm and in the lives of LGB people working at their firms. The activities that the networks undertook were focussed on the network's pastoral and business development roles.

Pastoral role

All of the networks maintained that their primary focus was to support and provide a sense of community to the LGB people working at the firm.

Symbolic role

Many of the networks studied maintained that even if they were facing a slump in the number of their activities, the fact that the network exists signified that the firm was committed to diversity and that the firm was an open and diverse place to work.

If you never use the group, then great, good luck, that's fine. For some people it'll give them security knowing that it exists. It's fine to have a policy and procedure. We've got it all. Anti-discrimination is written into every law, more or less. And people should be fine in every firm. But people aren't fine in every firm. The network shows that (the firm) respects the individual, we respect you, be yourself, come to work, have a good time, work hard, play hard. It doesn't matter who you are and we respect diversity of every kind in the work place.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

I think the network made more people aware that it was okay to be LGBT in the work place. It promoted the idea of diversity, internally. And if someone was having difficulty, the network could provide a support function for that person... so to make more people aware that there's a network. Maybe there are posters up saying that "we support you". It makes the message more out there, that you don't have to hide. I still think there are pockets of people still not comfortable because, even though they seem friendly in office, what happens in the pub after work? What about little comments in the office?

(Interview no. 11, male, Midlands, medium sized firm)

Community

All of the networks emphasised the importance in building a sense of community amongst LGB people within the firms. While the most common activity was organised drinks, they also organised film nights, sporting events, and other social activities.

One component is the social element, where we have drinks events for network members and friends of the network... that's just socialising, you may get together for dinner, you might go bowling... it's an opportunity for members of the network just to get to know each other and identify with all the people in the firm, who are like themselves...

We also annually have a summer party, which I guess is a celebration of our work over the year, but I think it's perceived to be one of the more significant LGBT events in the legal world every year, and that's a summer party where we have our clients, we invite other law firms, other diversity sectors, and we usually support... a charity every year and one of our partners does an address and tells people what we've done in the past year.

We also had movie nights... with popcorn, hotdogs and we show an LGBT movie and it's really good to invite client and staff to that.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

We did various celebrations during Pride month as well. So last year we sponsored the Pride gala dinner, which we sent a number of our network

members along to and we also invited some of our clients to come along to that event...

The group has enabled people to build up a network, and... through events that we've done, I've been pleased to see that there are genuine friendships among the group which potentially wouldn't be there if the network wasn't in place to have facilitated those networking opportunities in the first instance.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

Networking opportunities for LGBT staff

Several of the respondents spoke about how the network was also a networking opportunity within the firm for LGB staff. It provided a way in which people from different departments or at different seniority levels could meet and interact.

One of the important functions I see for the network is that partners and other higher-ups see and meet the new talent that's coming into the firm, outside of a formal firm wide event. Our (network) meetings tend to be smaller and more informal and happen regularly, so the opportunity for people at different tiers of the firm to meet and work together arise regularly.

(Interview no. 1, male, city firm)

In terms of career development, the group has facilitated opportunities for more junior staff to build a profile through their involvement in some of our working groups, and to build good networks with people across the firm. And you know, to also raise their own profiles... the associates wrote amazing blogs that went out to the entire office. It's an amazing opportunity for them to raise their profile.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

However, not everyone agreed that the LGB network should be used as a networking opportunity.

I can see that there are arguments both ways... but the idea that an LGBT group is meant for networking does not sit easy with me. It's sort of like you're using being gay as a short circuit to get to know partners who you wouldn't necessarily come into contact with in another way

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

Educational

Many of the networks felt that one of their core functions was to have educational or advocacy events where they might give insight into the lives of LGBT people, or raise an issue of contemporary political importance.

We have educational/advocacy type functions.. I guess it's about raising political or topical issues. So for example we had Peter Thatchell to come and speak... We had Gareth Thomas come and speak about his life and coming out... and we partnered with our sports committee for that, so it was a joint event between our LGBT network and our social committees, because quite a lot of the non-LGBT people who are interested in rugby came to hear that story.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

We ran a lot of events during LGBT history month... We had weekly blog posts which went out and we had a blog from our straight allies and we had a blog post from one of our gay male associates and we had a blog from one of our female bisexual trainees and we had this blog which is from one of our partners who champions our LGBT global initiative. All these emails went to all the staff in the building and they were designed to educate people, promote LGBT history month and promote our own LGBT network and allies programme, to educate people around the challenges, historically facing LGBT people and also to celebrate some of our own people and their stories. And we received just such a brilliant response. Each individual who wrote a blog, they drew on their own personal experiences. It was quite a brave thing to do, going out to 820 people saying you know, "I'm a bisexual woman and here's my story." The feedback we got was phenomenal. People were really moved and at the end of each blog, we gave people the opportunity to join as an ally.

We also had a reception for our allies network. We held a lunchtime talk with a speaker from Stonewall and we sold Stonewall cakes in our canteen and various other things. We really tried to make sure that whoever you are in the office, whatever your preferred method of communication, you'll have an appreciation of what LGBT history month actually means.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

One of the firms was setting in place a 'reverse mentoring' programme

Reverse mentoring is when a junior person meets with a senior person to talk about an issue for the junior person. So for example, when we – the network or the Straight Allies network – offers reverse mentoring, we have a junior LGBT person – they're usually a trainee – working with a member of the firm's board to talk about LGBT issues and to educate her on LGBT issues, because she's not LGBT herself. So we offer this 'reverse mentoring.'

(Interview no. 5, male, city firm)

Support for LGBT staff

Only one respondent (in a large city law firm) stated that the network had heard of and supported a person who had faced a homophobic comment. None of the other interviewees spoke about them knowing instances where a LGB member of staff in their firm had faced harassment, bullying or discrimination on account of their sexual orientation. Nevertheless, hypothetically, the networks envisaged themselves as having some informal role in supporting the person who may be the target of this harassment, bullying or discrimination, either as providing emotional support or helping them through any official process that could ensue.

If there were an issue (of harassment, bullying or a joke) then you have the ability to talk to anyone you want to. But if it comes down to something it's more of a sort of HR function... But I know of several instances where people have spoken to people about coming out and provided some assistance to them in the firm. But if you want support it's there. There's no set programme for it... you could informally speak to us.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

We set up an LGBT helpline email. It's an email address that goes to a mailbox that's manned by 4 people who are members of the LGBT network.

No one else is involved in that, there's no HR involved in this. We've had an initial training session had an initial telephone conference with Stonewall who provided tips on what we should look out for. We've also had a telephone conference with our HR team to see what the limitations are to see when we should then people to refer things to HR.

We haven't had many people emailing into the helpline. Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, I don't know.

(Interview no. 22, male, large Northwest firm)

Several of the respondents spoke of rare instances where people have come out later on in their life. Or, had come out in university, but "had gone back in the closet" at the law firm and were not sure on how 'out' they could be at the firm. They saw the network as providing a quiet forum where people could talk about coming out in a confidential manner. In some instances the people concerned contacted members of the network and did speak to them about coming out.

If anyone wants to get in touch and say, "look, you know, can I have a quiet word" or "I want to be involved openly", whatever it is, then we're there to do that. If someone said I wouldn't mind just some sort of advice on what it's like to be open at this law firm then they can contact one of us.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

However, not all the networks interviewed thought that people who were not out in their lives, would come out first at work

I mean, I don't see that happening. If you're not comfortable with who you are, or feel that you have certain issues about your identity, then you're really not going to come out at the place where you're employed, are you? I can see the network benefitting some people who are already out, but I don't see the network as being a place where people can come out, confidentially.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

Mentoring

About half the networks I spoke to also saw themselves as, formally or informally, mentoring new trainees or junior lawyers and university students. Most of the mentoring roles tended to be quite informal.

We have a more informal system... it's the way it's evolved... When people are in different offices they will meet up and have chats, and you know discuss where they're going. So there's some informal advice there. Likewise when we had a new partner joining and he joined the network. He said "I feel a bit out of sorts in the office, can anyone show me around?" But we've got no formal mentoring programme.

(Interview no. 22, male, large Northwest firm)

There's no formal mentoring programme to be honest. All mentorship programmes that I've ever seen amongst the solicitors have never worked. I think sometimes you get informal mentoring-type relationships develop. There have definitely been those but I think they depend on personal chemistry... These informal mentoring relationships have developed through the LGBT

network. One the junior lawyers, she saw me as a mentor. And it wasn't like, it was planned or anything like that. It came up when she was saying she'd been offered a mentor in her department but then she said, "I already thought I had one and it's you." Ha!

(Interview no. 9, female, city firm)

Some of the firms were testing out more formal mentoring systems.

There were six people in the network trained as mentors. They've been trained in their day job to be mentors, and have been able to translate that into supporting LGBT staff in a similar role. And there is take up, but it's not a formal programme. It's mentoring when people really want it. What we're doing now is moving to the next stage of training more people on it and those people who want a refresher, because it's been a couple of years...

... Another element is that we have to be visible to potentially more junior staff, or a new starter. We don't necessarily know how this might work, but it might be a case that there are certain people named very clearly either in the induction packs or in some way to new starter as an initial mentor for someone, especially for the junior hires or for the trainees...

(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

External and business development role

The respondents were cognizant that the network raised the profile of the firm and were often the "public LGBT and diversity face" of the firm. They were aware that the profile of the network showed that firm was not only a good place to work, but also a good firm to hire because of its diverse and inclusive work force. Many spoke of their rankings on the Stonewall WEI rankings and also stated that clients often asked to see their diversity policies. In their estimation, the network played an important role in building the profile and business opportunities for the firm.

Business development for the firm.

Given the organisations that we work for, you know the big PLC's the banks, the finance institutions and hospitals a lot of them score quite well on the Stonewall Index. So once we've inquired into what they're doing, you come up with all these resources that we're working with and it's helped us get some synergies with our clients. So you know there's a massive business development element to it.

(Interview no. 22, male, large Northwest firm)

Diversity training for other organisations, firms and clients

Another way that LGB networks build a connection between their firm and other organisations, is by helping the latter set up their own LGB networks.

We helped a couple of firms by sending our recruitment and diversity manager and making her available to go and talk to other law firms and in one instance they've actually set up a network.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

We do online diversity training for clients. We've got our online modules, they're written for us. As a network all of us can look at them and sort of approve them and give suggestions. So that's been going now for a couple of years. We've had some diversity trainings that have been set up specifically for the senior partner level and there was some feed into that.
(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

In one instance, I was told that the network asked that firm whether all the companies that it contracted services with (such as catering, security, hospitality and maintenance) also had diversity policies.

After we asked about the diversity policies of these external suppliers, what happened was that we were called in and asked to advise on how they should set up their LGBT network. Which was totally amazing! So now they have a policy and a small network of their own... and if you think about it, it's only fair. They work in the same building as we do, and even though they're more than welcome to be a part of our network, they need to respond to their own employers...
(Interview no. 2, male, city firm)

Charity support

Many of the firms would also regularly support a charity, either by hosting a fundraising event, or providing use of office space and facilities, or by doing pro bono work for that charity.

Every year we support an LGBT charity and we give them some profile at the summer party and usually make a donation to them and also work with them... by way of fundraising. We also do pro bono work for the charity.
(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

Quite early on, we got involved with a couple of charities, the Albert Kennedy trust and others. We hosted events at our offices and would help them fundraise or provide other support. We did youth conferences in to bring some of the kids involved in. A couple of people would go off on their own to work with them.
(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

Mentoring university students

Several of the firms also had schemes in place to mentor university students. Few of them had mentorship programmes for university students and graduates already in place, while others were toying with the idea.

We have a recruitment working party that works with something, you might of heard about from other firms, called DiverseCity. And they've explored other opportunities to engage with particularly trainee-level, graduate-level candidates...

We've partnered with LGBT societies at some of our target universities. We've done that in Oxford, Bristol and Kings College. We ran a cocktail evening with the LGBT society in Oxford and had a talk about the challenges of being openly gay in the city and that session was delivered by one of our partners and one of our senior associates and some of our graduate recruitment people as well.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

So I had a law student. My colleague, who's the chair had a couple of law students... And it was three mentoring sessions over three months, just to discuss with them what it's like being out in the work place. Tips, how they feel, how to approach a law firm. Some thought, should they come out at the interview or hid it? But also general tips, helping with the CV and interviews.
(Interview no. 11, male, Midlands, medium sized firm)

Membership

There were different membership criteria of the networks studied:

- Some networks were open to LGBT identifying people only.
- Some of the networks were open to all, LGBT and straight people.
- All but one of the networks were open to “fee-earners and non-fee-earners” alike. Meaning that their membership was open to solicitors of all levels, IT personnel, HR personnel, and support staff. Of these networks, all of them stated that most of their members were fee-earners.

Questions of who could be a member of the network were centred around concerns over the privacy and comfort of LGB members who might not be out in the wider work place. These issues were resolved, in part, by having two different email groups. One that was closed and private, where individuals would be bcc'd on, and the other was the open public list, which anyone could join.

Another predominant concern over membership, was that the majority of members tended to be gay men. While firms which conducted internal diversity surveys reported a number of lesbian and bisexual women amongst their ranks, this diversity of the LGBT population within the workforce was not reflected in the composition of the LGB network.

Most of the firms referred to themselves as LGBT networks. When specifically asked whether they were LGB networks or LGBT networks, all the respondents said that the networks were LGBT networks, but did not know of any transgender member of staff. Two firms stated that they did have transgender people on their staff, but who were not active in the network.

This high representation of gay men in the networks is related to another concern over membership. As most of the men who worked in the law firm were employed as fee-earning staff and most of the women were support staff, that membership was mostly made up of legal, fee-earning staff. Several of the networks felt that non-fee

earning and support staff (and hence mostly women) were under-represented in the network.

In terms of seniority of network members, there were no set patterns or tendencies across the networks studied. Some of them rued that they were top-heavy with mostly partners and senior staff being members of the network and with seemingly no junior staff to take up some of the network related work, while other networks were concerned that no out and senior members of the firm had become members of the network.

Most of our members are fee-earners, but there's certainly support staff, secretaries, and people who work on our office services team. There are a number of solicitors and one associate solicitor and now one director... We are aware that there are senior LGBT people in the firm but they're not on the open list.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

We have a mix of business and fee earners. About 70/30... We're mostly gay men, we do have transgender people in the firm but they are not overly active in the network, we probably need to engage more women and we've been looking at having some women-focussed events.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

There's a shrinking number of non-legal staff in that group... it's actually a very big thing for me that we are under-represented in terms of non-legal staff. You know half the people in the firm are non-legal whether they're secretaries or they do something else. It's probably less than half now. But they want a comfortable place to be gay as much as anybody else does. But yes, it's disproportionately legal staff... and women are under-represented. It's a bit depressing at the moment to be honest.

(Interview no. 9, female, city firm)

Straight allies

Straight allies are being promoted as a key marker of a workplace's equality and diversity policies. Stonewall reports that its

"Top 100 employers routinely tell us that 'straight allies' have been key to advancing fair treatment of their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff. Their involvement – often precisely because they're not gay themselves – can have a transformative effect on the culture of an organisation and the workplace experience of staff, both gay and straight."¹⁸

Many of the respondents interviewed similarly viewed the role of straight allies in making their firms more LGB-friendly.

We call them friends of the network. The idea came about from our party, when lots of people in the firm wanted to come to the summer party and we had a very tight guest list so it was principally the people who are part of the network. We realised that these people support the network and LGBT

¹⁸ Miles: 2011, at page 1.

colleagues... So we sort of said, well, why don't we have a friends list where people who are interested in LGBT issues, but don't identify as LGBT come along and support their friends and the network.
(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

Straight allies are not only seen as a source of support or strength in numbers, but are seen as providing cover to those people who would want to a part of LGBT events, but were not out at office.

I think straight allies helps, because I've experienced it. Sometimes you go for drinks and no one else you know is invited. And it helps for someone who's not comfortable, if a straight person he or she knows is going.
(Interview no. 11, male, Midlands, medium sized firm)

Around 2008, 2009 we made the decision to broaden out and open the group to straight allies and the impact that that's had – it's almost a surprising by product. What we didn't anticipate is by opening up the group to straight allies we would attract more LGBT people to the group. What we actually found was that for more individuals who weren't necessarily out in the office, they felt far more comfortable coming along to LGBT network and allies meeting... This extended group attracted a small number of lesbian and bisexual staff, which is really excellent because we're now in a position where the group is much more fully representative of LGBT people in the office...And we definitely found that the allies element of the group made the group feel a lot less male dominated so slightly more accessible to female members of staff and also provided a slightly safer avenue for people who weren't out at work to make the decision around whether they wanted to do that. And we do have members of the group who are out in the group but not necessarily out in their department. The majority of people who are out in the group are out in the broader office but there are some people who have chosen just to be out in the group...

The Allies network is a mechanism where our non-LGBT people can make an open statement that they're supportive of LGBT colleagues. There's a lot of research that indicates that LGBT people actually feel restricted from being open about their sexuality in the work place and they can be a lot less productive. There is a real business driver behind making sure this feels like an inclusive space... and for that we need to engage with straight allies.
(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

Straight allies are seen as essential to making the work place more welcoming to LGB people.

We're looking to Straight allies reverse mentoring as well. It's something we've discussed but not done it yet... Their role will be how to deal with LGBT issues that they might come across or support LGBT persons through something. And there's an element, I suppose, that we want to support staff potentially in their personal life, because everyone brings their personal life to work whether you want it or not...

We've started off quite slowly with the Straight allies. We've got about 90 straight allies, which is double the network. At this stage we're compiling a list of people, a lot of people are very senior, and to make sure we have some presence in every single office. Particularly the offices where there's only one or two LGBT people. So that new starters can see that there's representation in their office. It's about representation.

We're also looking at having little markers on everyone's desk. We haven't decided on what form it's going to take yet.

(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

There was still some scepticism about the role of straight allies of the LGBT network in some firms

The firm asked us about doing a Straight Allies Programme, which a lot of other organisations have done... But the network's overwhelming response was that it doesn't really fit with what we want to do. We don't think there would be any benefit from doing that...

My issue with it was, if someone's not a straight ally, they are they a straight enemy? And I just think it creates this sort of tension.. Our network's set up where if you want to join, and you're not LGBT, you're very welcome to.

There's no subgroup, there's no collateral group tied to it... And then there was this: how would you demonstrate being a straight ally? Would you be on a list? Would you have it on our email? And what benefit would you have by knowing that someone's on a list somewhere...

Maybe if we faced more hostility – if we would have been drowning in emails saying that people were getting negative treatment, then potentially we might have looked at, well reaching out to the straight population in the office. It's not something we felt was organic, for this organisation.

(Interview no. 22, male, Northwest, large firm)

There's a lot of discussion about straight allies... but my personal view is that I hope it doesn't happen. It requires people to badge themselves. It means, if you choose not to have a straight allies mug on your desk, does that mean you're either gay or homophobic or do you just not want a mug? For me I would resent that... On top of that, a friend was seconded to a bank and she went to one LGBT/straight allies event and the gay people were vastly in the minority and she thought what is the point of that when it's like any other event.

(Interview no. 9, female, city firm)

Structure

There were a number of ways in which the networks were structured. In all of these networks, the HR or diversity managers took varying degrees of responsibility – from managing the email groups, to pushing the networks to be more active.

Some of the networks were very informal without any heads or chairs of the networks. In these networks people took on responsibilities on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on their own enthusiasm and time constraints.

There's no head or core structure. There's the HR diversity manager, so she has a formal role within the firm to look at diversity matters and she's part of the group for that reason. We don't really have a head of the group.. we don't operate in that way. Our website doesn't say chair, or co-chair. It just has key contacts in alphabetical order.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

There's no chair or anything like that, thank God. I don't think anybody would want to do it and so any organisation of events is entirely on an ad hoc basis. If somebody is motivated to do it, they'll do it and nobody's motivated you have to assume nobody really wants it to be done, which I think is fine.

(Interview no. 9, female, city firm)

In other networks, there was a more formal structure with chairs who headed the group and took charge of overall coordination. In two of the networks there were various sub-committees or working parties to coordinate specific activities of the network.

We have an organisational chart. So at the moment there are two partners who really kind of lead... Senior partners who head up the group. We've got another chair who heads up the global LGBT initiative. And there's another partner who's been appointed our London office LGBT liaison officer. The entire group is then split into working parties, and each of those has a senior champion. And so those working parties deal with specific L,G,B and T issues and challenges...

So for instance we had a talk in the office last year basically to inform people around challenges facing bisexual staff and we are currently working as a group to put together a specific transgender policy... We have an international working party and at the moment things that the group has focussed on are for example, about overseas assignments. So if we were sending an openly gay trainee to our office in Moscow or Riyadh how do we support the individual, policies and support mechanisms around that.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

We have 2 co-chairs and there's a sort of committee which sits below that.. But things are just decided collectively... But we've got a separate committee that organises our summer party because it's just a mammoth event, so it takes a lot of effort and no one person could do that.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

Communicating to the firm

The networks are invested in ways in which to communicate their messages to the firm. Their aim is not only to keep their members and the wider firm abreast of their various activities, but also to keep the atmosphere of the firm as LGB-friendly as possible.

Email lists

As mentioned earlier – out of concern for the privacy of people who were not out – networks often maintain different email lists. In addition, the LGB-only list allows things like inclusive HR policies or potential activities to be discussed within the community, before opening out the discussion to non-LGB staff as well.

We've actually got 3 mailing lists... there's the LGBT open list, there's the closed LGBT list and then there's the friends of LGBT list... We have had great debates over whether we just forcibly have one open list and ...there's a whole myriad of views across the network about whether or not that's right or wrong... and then eventually we settled on sending out an email saying that if you don't open to be on the open list then we're going to assume that you want to go on the closed list... There are some who are on the closed list and who aren't on the open list.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

So we have two groups. We have a distribution list for LGBT colleagues, because there are things from time to time that we want run past that particular group as a sounding board before going out to the wider office... And then we have the LGBT/allies group. So to this group, for example, we sent out a newsletter that's a hints and tips guide for allies around communicating with LGBT colleagues.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

On induction day

Questions on how out to be in office often arise with new recruits – whether they are new trainees or parallel hires. Most of the networks are cognizant of this and have a presentation about their networks on induction day.

The (diversity manager) will go and speak (to the new inductees) and tell them about the various networks, the LGBT network or the disability network or the women in business network so that they'd be made aware of that and they would be directed to the appropriate place on the intranet where they can find that information.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

Through our on-boarding process, if someone is made an offer, they're provided with various pieces of literature online which includes details of all our diversity programmes so you'd find that. When people join as a part of our induction, we have a session, which introduces all of our various diversity initiatives and really focuses on the LGBT/allies networks and people are sent a follow up note giving them opportunities to join any of our diversity networks that they'd like to join. And I'll always offer the two and sit down with new members and just talk it through... If you join a network you don't have to come to every meeting. You don't have to come to meetings if you don't want to and if you choose to come for a meeting, we're not going to...hone in on you to say anything. You can just come and listen.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

Intranet webpage

Additionally, all of the firms stated that they maintained an intranet webpage which was aimed (with varying degrees of success) not only to keep people abreast of the activities of the network, but was also a resource from which people could access email lists, counselling services or ask a member of the network for informal advice.

We have a website, on the website are listed key contacts with profiles and photos and phone numbers, with an invitation to either contact us if they want to discuss anything or sign up and become a registered member, which they're free to do.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large firm)

If you literally type LGBT onto the intranet you'll get the pages. So you'll see not only all the information about what the network does, you'll see reports on activities. You'll see our pictures on the pages. There'll be a list of people who are mentors who you could go and talk to if you were worried. There's an email address that you send something through, if you have a question, and that's a private one, so it doesn't go to the whole group.

(Interview no. 22, male, Northwest, large firm)

Intrafirm newsletter

Some of the firms also published periodical intrafirm newsletters, through which the LGBT networks would sometimes publicise their events.

We're going to highlight it on, (the newsletter). So we're going to get an article, just to say "hi guys, we exist, log onto this website, contact one of the key contacts if you want to make yourself known, if you want to get involved, do anything, let us know.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large firm)

Office environment

One of the key ways that networks saw in making their offices more LGB friendly was to increase visible signs of this openness. Several of the networks said that they made sure posters went up in common office spaces such as cafeterias or elevators. Others increased visibility by having rainbow-themed mugs or mouse-pads.

We've put up our posters in the offices.. but it can be a wee bit gimmicky. So I'm thinking, we give (rainbow) mugs, just to let you know that gay people exist.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large firm)

We have posters in all our kitchens promoting our listening-ear programme. We have posters promoting some of our LGBT history month activities. We also displayed Stonewall posters on all our floors... We also sent every member of the allies network a rainbow mug with a note saying "We really hope you'll chose to put this on your desk so your colleagues can see you're a member of the allies." So imagine you're a new trainee, who's sharing a room with a partner or senior lawyer. If that trainee is LGBT and unsure if the person she is sharing a room with is going to judge her. If they see the mug on the table they can feel more comfortable. It's quite a big step.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

Challenges

Most of the respondents had very similar challenges. The most predominant challenge mentioned by far was that there was not enough time for the network members to devote to the network, despite the fact that, in several instances, firms have allowed them time to work on network related activities.

Aside from this, the most common concerns listed were:

- That there were people who were out in the firm, but not part of the network.
- That lesbian and bisexual women were not proportionately represented in the network.
- That, even while there were only handful of transgender persons in the some of the firms, none of them were active in the networks.
- Maintaining enthusiasm and momentum.

People who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual but not part of the network

Several of the networks expressed some concern that there were people who were out in the network, but were not part of the network. The explanation most commonly proffered was that people did not feel that their sexuality was relevant to their work life and that the network was not important enough to commit to.

The internal firm survey said there about 60 people who identified, but our list only has 20... People may think what's the point? I'm gay that's part of my life, it's not a reason to join the group... you know, my day job has nothing to do with being gay... Or people may say that there's no need for the group.
(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large firm)

It's not an issue for me, but it's a bugbear with other people. They want as many people as possible in the network to show that it's inclusive. But (my view) is as long as other people happy that they're LGBT and don't need to be in the network then that's absolutely fine. But I know that's a challenge that a lot of people see.
(Interview no. 22, male, Northwest, large firm)

Women's membership

One of the most predominant concerns for all the networks was the lack of participation by women in the LGBT networks. The most common reason offered for this is that LGBT networks are seen as dominated by gay men.

I think a lot of lesbians feel that there's more of an issue with them being out at work. And by joining the network you're almost putting your toe in the pool of coming out at work. So, even though we're completely private, you're testing on whether you can be out to some colleagues... Potentially because it's so overwhelmingly gay male they might feel even more marginalised.
(Interview no. 20, male, Northwest, large law firm)

I think one of the big challenges is that women tend not to come out, or tend not to take on the big role, the sort of role models. Even if they're a senior level, they potentially stand up less. They might work behind the scenes and be very supportive, but they're not at the moment at the same level as gay men in terms of visibility, presence and open support. And the result, I firmly believe, in the fact that less women come out and you have less women on the network...

It doesn't matter how confident the women is. They're not going to sit in a room if it's not beneficial to them. And gay networks lose female support more rapidly than they gain it... It's always that general gay networks that get the publicity and power and they actually do virtually nothing for women. Now matter how hard they try.
(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

I think legal gay men have a very easy environment here. I think there is a critical mass. You know there's no department you can go into now without there at least being two out gay men. Whereas the women... there are three of us firm wide. And I think the position for women in law firms, for all the diversity initiatives that are out there, are getting worse not better. And to just

set yourself apart on top of that, by being a gay woman... people could see that as just being too difficult. I hope that will change, but that's where we are at the moment... what's preventing women from coming out in the law firms is a lack of critical mass, more than anything. If everybody around you is talking about their boyfriends... or fawning about how handsome a gay man is, that doesn't really encourage women to come out.

(Interview no. 9, female, city firm).

Should there be a separate lesbian and bisexual women's network?

One of the suggestions that came up during the interviews was that there should be a separate network for lesbian and bisexual women within or between firms. This suggestion was put to several of the networks. Most felt that intra-firm networks for women would not work, but many felt that inter-firm or inter-professional lesbian and bisexual women's networks might work.

The problem is that I don't think there's a huge appetite for a gay women's network. It was felt that it's hard enough to get people to go along to the women's network event, so creating another category is quite difficult... I don't think there's a demand for it.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

I don't think individual firms would succeed. But targeted, cross firm events might. The big legal networks, like Interlaw don't do so well with women, but women only events do. Or events that are targeted at women. Also I think cross sector, cross firm networks might work really well.

(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

How do you attract more women to your network?

The networks were asked how they tried to get more women involved in their activities. Most of them said that they had tried, or were thinking about doing events targeted at lesbian and bisexual women or doing joint events with the intra-firm women's network.

I think we've been looking at it at trying to do more educational and lunchtime events, getting a broader range of speakers. And showing a lesbian film at movie nights... We're also trying to do something with the women's network.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

We're planning to do a join event between the LGBT network and the women's network. The women's network is far more concerned with lawyer progression and promotion and family issues. We need to do more targeted events.

(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

Transgender membership

Few of the firms had any transgender members of staff. Many of the firms stated that they had not thought about transgender policies because the need had thus far never

arisen. However where transgender people were known to be in the firm, the LGBT network has tried to influence policies to make them trans-friendly.

We're looking at potentially doing a transgender awareness talk which we're potentially going to engage with one of our clients later on this year. The next transgender awareness day in May.. We wanted to launch our transgender policy by that date, but that might be a bit too ambitious.

(Interview no. 13, female, city firm)

Maintaining enthusiasm

The networks I spoke to also stated that they felt that there was enthusiasm for their activities and events, but that the number of people willing to commit to organising them was stagnant or dwindling.

It's always a problem that you want to expand the number of people involved in organising the events...It's a real struggle to bring new blood in, and handing stuff down.

(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

It's getting people engaged, it's getting membership, that to me is the main thing. It's partly down to us to make sure we're promoting ourselves, we're reaching out, we're making ourselves available. But it's partly down to individual. If people don't want to get involved, it's their choice. But if a majority of people are of the view that it's nice that the network exists, that it's good for the firm, but on a day to day business people don't really want to be involved in it, then it's a challenge. I'm not sure how we solve it.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large firm)

Coordinating across offices within the firm

The narratives from the interviews indicate that it was not the firm that seemed to be the locus of the networking but the office. In several instances, while city based firms had an LGB network, regional offices seemed to be more involved with local inter-firm LGB networks.

We have one (member of the network) who is in the Southwest. She's a member of our firm's LGBT network. But I guess she's also got a heightened role because she's the LGBT rep for that office... In that office in the southwest, they tend to things with other firms a lot. If they are hosting a big party, they will invite other firms to that. We (in London) tend to work more with LGBT networks from our client development perspective.

(Interview no. 5, male, city firm)

Most of the firms mentioned in this part of the report had multiple offices the United Kingdom. Most of the networks in London expressed a certain frustration that they could not engage with their other offices more fully. I sensed that the problem was felt more acutely by firms based outside London (though they had offices in London).

Being a national firm has its benefits for our network, but it's quite difficult to say "hi let's just get together for a meal or something". There had to be a business reason and that never actually came about... We tried video conferencing, but those meetings don't substitute for actually getting together.

(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large firm)

For a medium sized firm in the midlands it's difficult to have any engagement with other law firms here. In London every law firm attends each others events. It doesn't tend to happen here.

(Interview no. 11, male, Midlands, medium sized firm)

Inter-firm and informal LGBT networks

This section of the report looks at the evolution, role and function that informal networks between LGB solicitors play in their lives. While conducting the research many of the interviews demonstrated how these internal informal networks were connected to formal networks between smaller firms.

The Law Society has previously commissioned a report on inter-firm LGBT networks.¹⁹ The aim here is not to replicate that research, but rather to explore how informal intra-firm networks interact with the formal inter-firm networks.

Inter-firm and informal intra-firm networks

Three of the firms interviewed for this project were members of inter-firm networks and had informal networks inside their firms. One of those is based in the Southwest, and two of those firms are based in London. These firms describe themselves as small to medium sized. These networks operate similar to the intra-firm networks of the big firms, except that they are spread across several firms.

The informal network within the firm

There were 5 people in the firm who identified as LGBT... Within the firm there was informal email group. And if you wanted to get on it, you just sent an email to one of them. There was no formal closed group if you didn't want to be out... you might've just been bcc'd on emails if you didn't want to come out but wanted to know what was going on.

(Interview no. 15, female, London, small firm)

We found that it will be difficult just in our firm to have an LGB network, purely because of the small number of LGB people that we employ that we know of, and also after that you have to factor in that perhaps a lot of them wouldn't want to be involved in it, so we'd probably end up with two people sat in a room once a month and going, "oh, it's just us again then." And that was a common sense, I think, with the other firms that got involved, is that perhaps they didn't have sufficient representation internally but still wanted to provide some sort of support network, which is why we teamed up and created the inter-firm network, so originally six firms I think.

(Interview no. 18, male, Southwest, medium sized firm)

The interfirm network

The inter-firm network arose out firms which felt a need to create a network for LGB people, but the firms individually only had a handful of out LGB people in their offices. These firms were also perceived that existing inter-firm networks catered mostly to the larger firm.

Approximately three or four years ago... You've heard of InterLaw, which is a group that we became interested in, while thinking about diversity, and what

¹⁹ Schirato: 2013.

we could do for employees, particularly LGBT members at the firm. We approached InterLaw to see whether there's an option there to get involved and our employees to get involved. At the time, we weren't deemed to be a large enough firm. I'm going back a while now, I hope that's still not the case...

I mentioned this to someone at another firm I knew... he mentioned it to other people at firms who couldn't join Interlaw because of barriers... So we thought, "okay, there's still a need here. If you're an employee in a large firm or a small firm, there still should be the same networking opportunities. So between us we created an inter-firm network of smaller, medium sized law firms..."

We agreed our objectives of the network as a whole, that each firm develop objectives for their particular firm about what they wanted to get out of the network.

(Interview no. 15, female, London, small firm)

Pooling resources and activities

The firms pooled monetary resources but also human resources into the inter-firm network.

Coordinators put themselves forward from each of the firms. So it wasn't an HR initiative, moving forward. Each firm then agreed to put a budget, so there was a sharing of costs as well... It was agreed that if you wanted to be a member, each firm had to agree to host at least one event every 18 months...

(Interview no. 15, female, London, small firm)

Policies

Firms would ask the network to review the policies of the participating firms.

We very much used the coordinators for things like looking at policy. So one of the ladies there was in a same-sex relationship and her partner had a baby. So when we looked at, sort of, the maternity arrangements there for the partner, she helped us and did some guidance and support around our policies.

(Interview no. 15, female, London, small firm)

Support for LGBT staff

The networks were similarly concerned with building a community amongst their LGB staff, but also providing career support and networking opportunities.

We very much used them as well, as sort of an internal resource and support of people who actually were sort of in those situations. So we'd have our objectives like mentoring and support for individuals; looking at role models; safe networking with a social element possibly there; raising internal awareness; acting as a representative, which we've talked about; and changes to firm policy; career development; and then, monitoring the market and community; engagement initiatives...

We also did mentoring, so the names of all the coordinators were publicised on the network's intranet site. Then they publicised that...so if anyone in particular wanted support and wanted to go to someone outside of HR who they knew was gay, they could do that confidentially. So they go and that person could then be a mentor or coach for them. And for the firm specifically, the four coordinators were sort of the LGBT champions and they could report back to HR any concerns or issues in a confidential way...

So we had particular events that were closed just to LGBT members and there were others that were open to all. And then we did a programme – this was probably more driven by our firm – for managers about raising awareness and dealing with diversity within your teams and particularly if you had LGBT members of the team and other things that might come up as a result.

(Interview no. 15, female, London, small firm)

So we have sort of formal events with speakers, but then we have quiz nights and bingo nights, and we tend to alternate between the two, so we'll have a formal one and a less formal. And we don't charge for the formal events. They're all free, so they're open to everybody. And...we don't just allow LGB people to come along. It's anybody really that has an interest in promoting the diversity of the profession is the tagline we tend to use.

(Interview no. 18, male, Southwest, medium sized firm)

Communication

Similar to the networks mentioned in the previous section, this network has its own intranet page and would similarly publicise its events by posters.

The network had its own posters and branding, their own logo. There were posters that went up through the intranet site as well, so not just the network's intranet site and we used something called the daily bulletin.

We communicate by way of the intranet and posters... the intranet is the first thing you see when you fire up the browser so it's quite a good way to communicate things... we put up posters in all the break rooms, and the lift. But nearer the date, we might spread news by word of mouth, by dropping people an email.

It's a small firm so if you wanted to do something you'd just speak to the rest and things get around by word of mouth...

(Interview no. 6, male, London, small firm)

Mentoring students

The network in the southwest had an outreach programme to the local universities

Also we wanted to promote the legal sector in the education sector, so to all the universities... There was... an event here one evening and a girl spoke to me and said, "oh, I came along because I was fascinated to know why on earth your law firm would be hosting an event of this nature." And she'd been told that if she put on her trainee application that she was involved in the LGBT network she'd be seen as a troublemaker and we wouldn't shortlist her. So that was quite interesting. So I think the ...network has been quite good in highlighting, the firm names in not just corporate circles.

(Interview no. 18, male, Southwest, medium sized firm)

Informal networks

The interviews for this part of the report were conducted with two women solicitors who were fairly senior in their firms: one was a high street practice in London, the other was small firm in the Northeast. The interviewees were in legal aid based practices, with one of them describing herself as being in "a fairly left wing practice" and another was "rooted in radical feminism".

Since the interviewees were relatively secure in their firms, the 'networks' described in these interviews were more about forging connections than they were about networking and support, in the sense used by the formal networks. The interviewees provided insights about how they forged their networks and also about what issues solicitors who might work outside the city or big firms may face.

Early Careers

Both described how the communities that they were part of either helped them overcome prejudice or immunised them from any overt homophobia.

When I was first qualifying, I remember being told, don't come out or you'll never get any work. You know, don't come out, you'll never be allowed to work with children kind of thing. And you used to hear of a lot of homophobia...particularly around LGBT adoption or fostering. But it's been a long, long time since I've heard that sort of thing...I remember I was representing some children in a case and the children were being adopted by a lesbian couple and there was this very senior well-known solicitor from the Northeast engaging me in conversation and said, you know, it's really disgusting these people think they have a right to children... used to be common currency.

*I think I had a very strong community of working class women lawyers that was very, very supportive. And I think that just started very, very informally. There was two or three of us who were working class... working at the same practice. You know, you'd get a phone call saying "so and so has really pissed me off, meet me in the pub" sort of thing... You know, as we grew in experience, we grew, our reputations grew, we didn't need that so much. But for a young person starting out... it was different
(Interview no. 12, female, Northeast)*

When I first joined the firm – which had maybe 25 to 30 lawyers – which was about 20 years ago now, there were three or four out lesbian and gay solicitors, so we had a kind of, informal, let's go around the pub kind of network...

There was one guy who was quite flamboyant and very out. The two women who were at the firm were also out. The culture of the firm, although it was small, was very equalities based and there was never any question of me not being out. People knew from a very early stage. We just had conversations in which it emerged and it was very comfortable...

*I worked in the voluntary sector before I joined the firm where lots of things were assumed... and that I assumed that I could be out.
(Interview no. 10, female, London, high street)*

Culture of the firm

Both interviewees spoke of their firm's culture, the work their firms do as one of the main reasons why they felt the ability to be open in their work places.

There are few solicitors in the city who are known to be gay, several working here actually. There are two fairly left wing practices, which is ourselves and another major legal aid practice in the Northeast who are both human rights practices, and those are the practices where you'll find the gay solicitors. I suppose we do stuff together like around the celebration around same-sex

marriage, there were quite a few of us who went out to a celebration... It was also a kind of half-advice giving session. It was just nice to be a part of an event you know.

I also write an LGBT law column for a local LGBT publication. Our firm also has a LGBT services leaflet – things like civil partnership, marriage, adoption, surrogacy... stuff like that... We also advertise in the gay press looking for recruits

(Interview no. 12, female, Northeast)

We come out of the background of doing almost entirely legal aid work and the majority of the money comes from the work women do and the work women solicitors do... How do you not get a macho culture in a firm? Having women in positions of power, I think that helps enormously. I don't think the culture of this firm is only to do with the personalities of the partners. I think it's also to do with what work we prioritise.

(Interview no. 10, female, London, high street)

Isolation and homophobia

Even while she said that she had not heard of an overt homophobic remark in a “long, long time” one of the interviewees gave an example of a recent case of homophobic bullying that she had heard of.

Homophobia has not entirely gone away. I heard of an instance where a student here had gone on her first placement and had decided to come out on the first day because she thought it would be the best course of action and she was immediately told by her boss “if I'd known that, I wouldn't have hired you” and then was homophobically bullied constantly and got really sick for a while.

(Interview no. 12, female, Northeast)

The other interview gave a sense of the isolation that people in small practices may feel.

Again, because it's the kind of place where one is open and one has an hour at court to, kind of kick one's heels while one waits for the judge... you know solicitors talk about which public schools they're going to get their kids into, and lesbians and gay men talk about which club they went to, and there are ways in which we recognise each other, aren't there? ... I mean it's good to know that you're not the only person (who's LGBT) there.

I was approached by a solicitor who found herself in quite an isolated situation and who actually asked if I would almost befriend her. I think because of her isolation. I don't know how she knew who I was or how I was (lesbian)... she obviously had some idea and she outed herself. So I reciprocated in the way that one does and a casual friendship developed.

(Interview no. 10, female, London, high street)

She also gave a sense of how she makes or builds upon connections with the people around her.

I have informal connections with people I know from my college days or my old radical feminist days. I'm not associated with kind of, political groupings and within the sphere of work that I do, so I meet people at court and I can think of perhaps a dozen lesbian or gay solicitors who I know who also practice in the field...

From these connections, I'm not so isolated...If I was having a bad time about this or that, which was specifically related to my sexual orientation or identity, then these are the people I would speak to about it and I wouldn't be sitting there thinking that there's no one I can go to, there's no one I can talk to.
(Interview no. 10, female, London, high street)

Role for the Law Society

The vast majority of people interviewed for this project had had no contact with the Law Society, and several were not aware of the Law Society's Diversity and Inclusion Charter or that their firms had signed on to it.

Most of the big law firms based in the city were of the opinion that they "*were, frankly, way ahead of the Law Society on all of this stuff*" (Interview No. 5, male, city firm) and saw that the role of promoting LGBT diversity and inclusion in the sphere of big law firms in London was already occupied by Stonewall and InterLaw.

We haven't had that much contact with the Law Society, and I supposed our firm and a handful of others are ahead of the Law Society's thinking on this... I don't see the Law Society as leading on any of these LGBT issues.
(Interview no. 14, male, city firm)

These big city-based law firms, the smaller firms in London, and the law firms outside of London were agreed that the Law Society had a role in promoting LGB equality and diversity amongst smaller law firms, and those outside of the city.

A lot of things happen in London... it's my bugbear. I think some of the things that I think we benefit from would be to do events in the regions. I think the Law Society could send out a newsletter about events in the regions...
(Interview no. 20, male, Southwest, large law firm)

(The) Law Society could provide advice on smaller firms on how to set up networks. Especially when you move outside into the regions where there are hundreds of firms but you might only get one gay person in every fourth firm or something who does need some support. And the Law Society needs to be visible in that situation.
(Interview no. 21, female, city firm)

Most of the respondents saw a role for the Law Society in coordinating events targeted at smaller firms, or firms that were based outside London. Some of the suggestions that came up during the interviews include:

- Setting up meetings or a social event in the regions to kick-start discussions about having a local inter-firm LGBT networks outside of the city.
- Run networking events for LGBT people employed at smaller firms and for firms outside the city.
- Make Law Society facilities available for those who want to run networking events for LGBT people working in smaller firms.
- Conduct or coordinate networking events targeted at lesbian and bisexual women who work at law firms.
- Publicise legal LGBT events outside London.

- Make training and advice available for smaller firms, or groups of firms on how to go about setting up a LGBT network.
- Work with local firms and networks outside London to organise Law Society-branded events, like speakers and panels about LGBT topics.
- Organise a course, lecture, seminar programme or other method of study around LGBT issues that would count towards CPD points.

Conclusions and avenues for further research

One of the initial aims for this study was to ask what a successful network looked like. In response to a question of how they measured their success, networks marked their success externally – that is, how the network continued to build the business for the firm, by interacting with client networks and producing more connections through the industry.

Another – and by their own account more important – marker of success for the networks was the well-being of the LGBT employees at the firm. From this perspective, LGB networks felt they would be successful if they were no longer necessary to support LGB staff. The sense I got from some of the networks was that while this was not the case and that they felt positively about their role in the firm, they nevertheless struggled to get a sense of how much of an impact they were actually having on the working lives of the LGBT employees.

Further quantitative research is required to see what value LGB people working in firms attach to these LGB networks, and what those running the networks could do better for their LGB co-workers. More specifically, even though the Chittenden and 2010 report cited instances of harassment, discrimination or an inhospitable atmosphere, all but one of the respondents interviewed for this report stated that they had never heard of such instances in their work places.

Therefore, further research is required to address the following points:

- Whether LGB people in firms continue to face issues of harassment, discrimination or issues about being out at the work place.
- The role of networks in supporting LGB people who may face such issues.
- The number or proportion of firms that have an intra-firm network or are part of inter-firm LGB networks.
- The reason why firms do not have intra-firm networks or are not a part of inter-firm networks.
- What value LGB people in firms attach to the LGB networks.
- The reasons for LGB people not participating or being actively involved in the networks.
- The attitude of LGB people in firms to straight allies' networks.
- How networks can play a more meaningful role in the lives of LGB people working at the firms.

More specifically, research ought to be aimed at people working in smaller firms outside the city and firms based outside London.

Further quantitative and qualitative research is also especially required into how lesbian and bisexual women fare in law firms and what value they derive from these networks. Research ought to be addressed to the following points:

- The specific issues lesbian and bisexual women face in law firms.
- Why lesbian and bisexual women do not participate in established LGB networks in firms.
- Whether lesbian and bisexual women are more active in women's networks (where they exist) in firms.
- What more could LGB networks do to support lesbian and bisexual women.
- Whether lesbian and bisexual would join an inter- or intra-firm network meant specifically for lesbian and bisexual women.

Quantitative research is also required in determining what proportion of the work force in law firms identifies as transgender. Quantitative and qualitative research is also needed to determine what the career experiences of transgender people has been in these law firms, specifically addressed to the following points:

- How many firms survey or collect demographic data addressed to transgender employees.
- How many firms have policies directed at supporting transgender employees.
- The specific issues that transgender people face in law firms.
- The types of support to transgender people in firms want and need.
- Whether LGB networks in firms are the proper forum to provide support for transgender employees.

The big city firms felt that the Law Society had a very limited role with regard to their own networks with many of the respondents feeling that they were ahead of the Law Society with regard to LGB networks in law firms. All of the respondents felt that the Law Society could play a leading role in promoting LGB diversity and equality in law firms and among solicitors outside of the big city law firms and in firms outside of London. Some of the suggested activities for the Law Society were detailed in the previous section.

Specific qualitative and quantitative research is required to address the following points:

- The specific issues that lawyers outside of the big city firms and outside of the formal solicitors' networks face.
- What forms of support would these lawyers want and need.
- Whether solicitors working outside the city firms would be interested in an LGB network.
- Specifically what activities of a network would provide the most benefit to LGB solicitors.

Future research may consider Appendix 2, which is a draft questionnaire about the role, value and impact of LGB networks and contains speculative questions about what the role of the Law Society ought to be.

References

- Chittenden, Tara (2006) *Career Experiences of Gay and Lesbian Solicitors* (London: The Law Society).
- Cowan, Katherine (2005) *Network Groups: Setting up networks for lesbian, gay and bisexual employees* (London: Stonewall).
- Miles, Nathaniel (2011) *Straight Allies: How they help create gay-friendly workplaces* (London: Stonewall).
- Schirato, Elena (2013) *Success Factors for LGB Networks in the Legal Sector and Importance of Engaging with Straight Allies* (Unpublished).
- The Law Society (2010) *Law Society Survey of LGB Solicitors 2009* (London: The Law Society).
- The Law Society (2013) *Diversity and Inclusion Charter: Annual Review 2012* (London: The Law Society).

Appendix 1: questionnaire and checklist for the interviews

Code number: _____

Name:

Network name:

Firm:

- State goals of research and introduce research project.
- Confidentiality Statement.

History of the network

- 1) How did the network begin? Why was it set up?
 - a. Was the network set up in response to external pressures?
 - b. Or was the network set up in order to help LGB employees?
- 2) What were the goals of the network?
- 3) What does the network do?
 - a. Does your network intend to be more inclusive for LGBT members only so that LGBT members can share their experience/thoughts in a confidential manner?
 - b. Or is your network open to everyone regardless of their sexuality so that awareness can be raised throughout the firm and your diversity/equality message can be delivered to non-LGBT staff?
- 4) What has been the programme of events in the last 12 months?
 - a. Do you think social events are an effective way to engage your LGBT employees?
 - b. Does the network offer LGBT focused mentorship programme?
 - c. Is the network/firm active in a LGBT focused recruitment initiative?
 - d. Are the topics addressed at LGBT events organised by the network?
 - e. Does any firm support/ commit to support any LGBT related charity or community work?
- 5) Who is the network aimed at?
- 6) How many members do you have?
- 7) What is the demographic composition? L,G,B,T age, professional/career position, lawyers v. non-lawyers?
- 8) What percentage of your members would you say are "active" members?
- 9) What is the average 'stay' of members?
- 10) What is the geographical spread of the network?

Support

- 1) What kind of support do you provide solicitors?
- 2) What kind of support does the firm provide?
 - a. Does your LGBT network get a specific funding or does it get funding through a general budget for diversity initiatives within your firm? If it is a specific funding does it get the same proportion as other networks within your firm?
- 3) What main challenges does your network face?
- 4) When your network or your members face problems, where do you or they turn to for support?

- 5) Do you provide support to individual solicitors who may face problems related to their sexual orientation?
- 6) What kind of support do you provide?
- 7) How would you rate the support you do provide?
- 8) What more could the network have done to provide support?
- 9) Does the network have straight allies?
 - a. Is any straight alliance within a firm (as a sub-group of a LGBT network)?
- 10) What role if any do 'straight allies' play in supporting the network in particular and LGBT diversity policies and practices in the firm in general?
- 11) How does your network interact with other, different networks - faith/ethnicity/gender/shared interests, - especially those which may have alternative views on the LGBT issues?
- 12) Assuming your firm has a straight alliance, what do you think the role of a straight alliance is and how would it help in promoting diversity/equality values (from LGBT perspective)?
- 13) What approach does a firm take to promote its diversity values especially to future lawyers (students/trainees/paralegals) and encourage them to apply for training contracts etc.?
- 14) What role does the network have in recruitment and promotion?

Role of the Law Society

- 1) What role does the Law Society play in the life of the network?
- 2) What role would you like to see it play? What would a successful role for the Law Society in the lives of LGB solicitors look like?
- 3) Do you think it would be more appropriate for each individual firm to work out a plan to support its LGBT employees or an overarching/official regime to be imposed by the Law Society required?
- 4) Do you think the role of the Law Society would be limited in respect of the LGBT issues and the welfare of its LGBT members throughout the profession given that most major law firms have established their own LGBT networks and have policies in place in respect of discrimination at work?
- 5) What do you think the Law Society can do to ensure that the rights of its LGBT members working at a smaller establishment/outside of major cities are not compromised?
- 6) What do you think the role of the Law Society should be given that there exist industry-wide LGBT networks such as the Interlaw?

Appendix 2: draft questionnaire for further (quantitative) research into LGB networks

Biographical information

- 1) How old are you?
 - 20-25
 - 26-30
 - 31-35
 - 36-40
 - 41-45
 - 46-50
 - 51-55
 - 56-60
 - 61-65
 - 66+

- 2) How do you identify yourself?
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Male bisexual
 - Female bisexual
 - Male to female transgender
 - Female to male transgender

- 3) Where is your primary office located?

- 4) In what capacity do you work at your law firm?
 - Business services
 - IT
 - Human resources
 - Trainee solicitor
 - Associate
 - Senior associate
 - Partner

- 5) As a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person, what kind of issues do you face at your work place?
 - Discrimination on account of your sexual orientation or gender identity
 - Transphobic or homophobic remarks or jokes
 - Harassment or bullying
 - A 'macho' or very straight atmosphere
 - You're not sure how 'out' you can be at your office and to your colleagues
 - Other (please detail)

Internal formal LGBT network information

- 6) Is there a formal LGBT network within your law firm?
 - Yes
 - No (skips ahead to next part of the survey)
 - Don't know (skips ahead to next part of the survey)
- 7) Are you a member of the LGBT network?
 - Yes
 - No
- 8) If you are not a member of the LGBT network, why not?
 - I'm not interested
 - I don't have the time for it
 - I'm not out about my sexual orientation or gender identity at work
 - I don't see how my sexual orientation or gender identity is relevant to my professional relationship.
 - I'm not sure if there is an LGBT network at my office
 - Other (please detail)
- 9) If you are not a member of the LGBT network, what factors would influence you to join the network?
 - Ensuring some events/activities open to LGBT colleagues only
 - If your identity was kept private
 - Ensuring some events/activities were a during work hours
 - Other (please detail)
- 10) Does the LGBT network have any representation in the office you normally work at?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 11) Does the LGBT network do any activities at or with your office?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 12) How did you hear about the LGBT network in your office?
 - Information about it was part of the induction pack/day program
 - Staff intranet
 - Word of mouth
 - Poster or pamphlet
 - I haven't heard of any LGBT network at my office
 - Other (please detail)
- 13) Approximately how many people are a part of the LGBT network in your office? [Box]
- 14) Approximately how many people are a part of the LGBT network in your firm [Box].
- 15) Is the network open to straight people as well as LGBT people?
 - Yes

- No
- Don't know

16) Do you think straight people should be a part of your LGBT network?

- Yes
- No

17) Why? [Box]

18) Do you have a separate 'straight allies' network?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

19) Do you think there should be a straight allies network?

- Yes
- No

20) Why?
[Box]

21) Is there a forum or list serve in the office/firm/LGBT network that an LGBT person can be a part of without revealing his or her identity, but can still be kept abreast of LGBT network activities in the firm or office?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

22) What are the main benefits of the LGBT network

- A sense of community.
- A forum to support LGBT co-workers
- Mentoring for new recruits or for students
- Business development for you and the firm
- Professional networking
- Something fun
- Outreach to LGBT charities
- Improving LGBT policies of the firm
- Improving the attitudes towards LGBT people within the firm and creating a welcoming working place for LGBT people
- No benefits
- Other (please detail)

23) What sorts of events and activities does the network do?

- Social events outside the office for LGBT staff
- Social events for all (LGBT and straight) staff
- Events within the office (for e.g., invited speakers, forums on specific LGBT issues)
- Outreach/support for LGBT charities
- Host joint events with LGBT networks in other firms
- Host joint events with LGBT networks in client organisations
- Put out information on contemporary LGBT issues
- A forum to speak about harassment, discrimination, homophobic or transphobic remarks

- Mentoring for new recruits or for students
- Other (please detail)

24) Can you rank, from 1 to 9, which of these activities you take the most from? 1 being the most important to you, 9 being the least

- Social events outside the office for LGBT staff
- Social events outside the office for all staff
- Events within the office (for e.g., invited speakers, forums on specific LGBT issues)
- Outreach/support for LGBT charities
- Host joint events with LGBT networks in other firms
- Host joint events with LGBT networks in client organisations
- Put out fliers on contemporary LGBT issues
- A forum to speak about harassment, discrimination, homophobic or transphobic remarks
- Mentoring for new recruits or for students

25) What kind of support does your firm provide to your internal network?

- Financial support
- Allows you to take hours off to work on network related work
- Makes the existence of the LGBT network publicly known
- Allows the use of office space for LGBT network events
- Other (please detail)

26) What more could the firm/office do to support the network?

[Box]

Formal inter-firm networks

- 27) Is your firm part of an inter-firm LGBT network
- Yes
 - No (skips ahead to the next part of survey)
 - I don't know (skips ahead to the next part of survey)
- 28) If yes, what is it called?
[Box provided]
- 29) What kind of support does your firm give to this inter-firm network?
- Financial support
 - Allows you to take hours off to work on network related work
 - Makes the firm's membership in the LGBT network publicly known
 - Allows the use of office space for LGBT network events
 - Other (please detail)
- 30) Are you a member of the inter-firm LGBT network?
- Yes
 - No
- 31) If you are not a member of the inter-firm the LGBT network, why not?
- I'm not interested
 - I don't have the time for it
 - I'm not out about my sexual orientation or gender identity at work
 - I don't see how my sexual orientation or gender identity is relevant to my professional relationship.
 - I'm not sure if my office is a member of an inter-firm LGBT network.
 - Other (please detail)
- 32) Does the LGBT network have any representation in the office you normally work at?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 33) Does the LGBT network do any activities at or with your office?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 34) How did you hear about the inter-firm LGBT network in your office?
- Information about it was part of the induction pack/day program
 - Staff intranet
 - Word of mouth
 - Poster or pamphlet
 - I haven't heard of any LGBT network at my office
 - Other (please detail)
- 35) Approximately how many people are a part of the inter-firm LGBT network in your office? [Box]
- 36) Is the network open to heterosexual people as well as LGBT people?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

37) Do you think straight people should be a part of your LGBT network?

- Yes
- No

38) Why? [Box]

39) Does the inter-firm network have a separate 'straight allies' network?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

40) Do you think there should be an inter-firm straight allies network?

- Yes
- No

41) Why?

[Box]

42) Is there a forum or list serve that an LGBT person can be a part of without revealing his or her identity, but can still be kept abreast of LGBT network activities in the firm or office?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

43) What are the main benefits of the LGBT network

- A sense of community.
- A forum to support LGBT co-workers
- Business development for you and the firm
- Professional networking
- Something fun
- Outreach to LGBT charities
- Improving LGBT policies of the member firms
- Improving attitudes towards LGBT people within the firms and creating a welcoming working place
- Mentoring for new recruits or for students
- No benefits

44) What sorts of events and activities does the network do?

- Social events outside the office for LGBT staff
- Social events for all staff
- Events within the office (for e.g., invited speakers, forums on specific LGBT issues)
- Outreach/support for LGBT charities
- Host events with other firms that are a part of the inter-firm network
- Host joint events with LGBT networks in client organisations
- Put out fliers on contemporary LGBT issues
- A forum to speak about harassment, discrimination, homophobic or transphobic remarks

- Mentoring for new recruits or for students
- Other (please detail)

45) Can you rank, from 1 to 9, which of these activities you take the most from? 1 being the most important to you, 9 being the least

- Social events outside the office for LGBT staff
- Social events outside the office for all staff
- Events within the office (for e.g., invited speakers, forums on specific LGBT issues)
- Outreach/support for LGBT charities
- Host joint events with other firms that are a part of the network
- Host joint events with LGBT networks in client organisations
- Put out fliers on contemporary LGBT issues
- A forum to speak about harassment, discrimination, homophobic or transphobic remarks
- Mentoring for new recruits or for students

46) What kind of support does your firm provide to the network?

- Financial support
- Allows you to take hours off to work on network related work
- Makes the existence of the LGBT network publicly known
- Allows the use of office space for LGBT network events
- Other (please detail)

47) What more could the firm do to support the network?

[Box]

Informal networks

48) Do you know of any other LGBT people in your office?

- Yes
- No

49) If yes, what are the main benefits of knowing other LGBT people in the office?

- A sense of community.
- Someone to talk to about being LGBT at your office
- Professional networking
- It's fun to have other LGBT people around
- No benefits

50) If no, why do you think that is?

- People don't feel comfortable being out at my office
- We're a very small office and there are no LGBT people who work here
- Other (please detail)

51) What sorts of activities do you do with the other LGBT people who work at your office?

[Box]

52) In the absence of a formal network, how do you make it known to, say, new recruits, that there are other LGBT people in the office?

[Box]

53) Do you think you would benefit if there were a formal LGBT network that you could be a part of?

- Yes
- No

54) Why?

[Box]

Questions for lesbian or bisexual women in law firms²⁰

- 55) Are you a part of an informal or formal LGBT network?
- Yes
 - No
- 56) If no, why not
- The network is too much of a male space
 - Most of the network events and activities take place after work hours
 - I'm not interested
 - I'm not out at work
 - The network does not speak to my concerns
 - Other (please detail)
- 57) Are you a part of a women's network at your office or firm?
- Yes
 - No
- 58) If you are a part of a women's network, what do you get from the women's network that you don't get from the LGBT network?
[Box]
- 59) What factors would influence you to become a part of an LGBT network?
- Make some events/activities open only to LGBT persons
 - Make some of the events/activities specific to lesbian and bisexual women
 - Make some of the events/activities during working hours
 - Other (please detail)
- 60) Would you join an inter-firm network meant specifically for lesbian or bisexual women?
- Yes
 - No
- 61) Would you join an intra-firm network meant specifically for lesbian or bisexual women?
- Yes
 - No

²⁰ This section is being included as mainly men populated many of the networks.

Questions for transgender people²¹

62) Are you a part of an informal or formal LGBT network?

- Yes
- No

63) If no, why not

- The network is too much of a male space
- I'm not interested
- I'm not out at work
- The network does not speak to my concerns
- Other (please detail)

64) Are you a member of any other LGBT or transgender professional network?

- Yes
- No

65) If you are a part of another network, what do you get from that other network that you don't get from the inter-firm/intra-firm LGBT network?

[Box]

66) What factors would influence you to become a part of an LGBT network?

- Make some events/activities open only to LGBT persons
- Make some of the events/activities specific to transgender people
- Other (please detail)

67) Would you join an inter-firm network meant specifically for transgender people?

- Yes
- No

68) Would you join an intra-firm network meant specifically for transgender people?

- Yes
- No

²¹ This section is being included as mainly men populated many of the networks.

General

- 69) Would you be interested in being a part of local area LGBT network for people working at law firms?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
- 70) If no, why?
- Already part of a network
 - Not interested
 - Don't have the time
 - Don't see any benefit of being a part of such a network
 - Other (please detail)
- 71) What activities of such a network would interest you?
- Drinks or other social events with LGBT people who work at local law firms
 - Networking events with local LGBT people who work at law firms
 - Fundraising for local LGBT charities
 - Speakers' forums, panels on LGBT issues
 - Educational events
 - Networking with local businesses
 - Networking with local professionals
 - Other (please detail)
- 72) Would you be interested in a LGBT legal network site – similar to Facebook or Yammer?
- Yes
 - No
- 73) Would you attend an LGBT event - say a speaker, a debate – organized by the Law Society?
- Yes
 - No
- 74) If the Law Society were to hold an LGBT themed educational event that would count towards Continuing Professional Development points, would you attend?
- Yes
 - No
- 75) Do you think your firm would be interested in being a part of a mentoring program for LGBT students?
- Yes
 - No
- 76) Do you think it would help LGBT equality in law firms for the Law Society to compile and publish an LGBT Equality Index for law firms?
- Yes
 - No