A collaboration between Sheffield University’s LGBT+ Committee and Multifaith Chaplaincy Service

**LGBT+ Students and Faith in Sheffield**

**A Guide to faith communities**

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**LGBT+ students and faith in Sheffield**

This guide is a collaboration between Sheffield University's LGBT+ Society and Multifaith Chaplaincy. It is based on a survey that was emailed to every faith group listed on the University 'Faith in the City' website. The survey asked groups to describe how that faith community or place of worship would react to openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans\* students.

The survey questions were:

* How would your community react to an openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual student who came to your place of worship/community?
* Would the reaction be different if that student was currently in a relationship with someone of the same gender? - If yes, please specify in what ways it would be different.
* What are your community's views or opinions on same-sex marriage?
* How would your community react to a trans\* student who came to your place of worship/community?
* Would someone who is openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans\* be able to serve in a position of responsibility in your place of worship/community?
* How would your community advise a student who came to you for support because they were confused or struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity?

The survey included explanations of the terms ‘sexual orientation’, ‘gender identity’ and ‘trans\*’.

In total, 14 places of worship responded to our survey and are included in this guide. The responses are listed alphabetically within faith tradition, with Christian responses listed by denomination. We recognise that this can be a contentious topic and so we are seeking to provide a matter-of-fact guide that reflects the range of attitudes that might be encountered in Sheffield. To try to make sure that we accurately represent the responses from different faith communities we have used excerpts from their answers in the guide.

**Buddhism**

Samantha Meditation  
“Everyone is welcome to attend classes. Openly lesbian, gay or bisexual students would not be treated differently.” The community would be supportive of struggling students, but “for specific help, it may be necessary to ask elsewhere”. Individuals in same-sex relationships would not be treated differently: “People are free to make their own decisions on marriage. It would not affect the relationship between teacher and student.” An openly LGBT+ student would be able to hold a position of responsibility.

Sheffield Soto Zen

Openly LGBT+ students “would be, have been and are welcomed and offered meditation instruction and support on exactly the same basis as anyone else.” For struggling students the community would “offer support, though not specific counselling on issues of sexuality and gender identity since, as a community, we are not really qualified to do so. However existing LGBT members would be well-placed to advise on how meditation and our wider practice might bear on these questions and experiences.” The community is supportive of same-sex marriage; and students with an LGBT+ background would be able to hold a position of responsibility.

Soka Gakkai International – UK, Lay Buddhist Organisation  
“All people are welcome to join SGI-UK meetings, there are no exceptions.” With respect to a student struggling with their sexuality or gender identity, “members in SGI-UK are not counsellors” and so would not be expected to provide this type of support. A guest or member would be “encouraged to challenge themselves through faith, practise and study, however it should not be confused with the need to seek the support of the relevant professional body e.g. Counselling Services, Doctors, when dealing with matters of a personal nature.”

**Christianity**

Anglican

St Mark’s Broomhill  
St Mark’s aims “to offer an open welcome to all who come to this church. Several members of the church are LGBT and we would hope that anyone who comes along would feel valued for who they are regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.” They specifically identified the potential needs of trans\* students, and said “the openness and inclusivity of St Mark's makes this a place where people are free to be their true selves”.

Any student struggling with their sexual or gender identity would be able to access confidential support from within the church and would be encouraged to access LGBT support groups (at the university or local), or professional counselling if that was considered appropriate. They are “currently exploring whether to start an LGBT group here at church and if someone is wanting prayer support they could be confident that this would be a safe environment for them”.

Students in same-sex relationships are also welcome. The church would “love to be able to conduct same-sex marriage services” but as a Church of England church, it is not allowed to do so. Openly LGBT people are already holding roles of responsibility at St Mark’s.

St Mary’s Walkley  
Everyone is welcome and all are “unique human beings who are loved by God”. They would be supportive of students who are trying to discover their sexual orientation or gender identity. In regard to the community’s views on same-sex marriage, “as a church in Sheffield Diocese, we would obey the Church of England line. If a same sex married couple turned up that would be absolutely fine.” Openly gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans-students would be able to serve in a position of responsibility at St Mary’s once they have been at the church long enough and have shown themselves to be responsible.

St Timothy’s Crookes  
St. Timothy’s said this about itself: “We would be welcoming, as a church, but I cannot speak for every member of the congregation!” LGBT people and couples have, however, been active members of the congregation and “very much loved and involved in the life of the church”. They said that “St Tims is known to be pretty gay friendly. We would not be in favour of anyone- gay or straight - swapping partners, so not very supportive if someone wanted to keep their options open!”

When advising a student who was struggling with their gender identity or sexual orientation, they would “seek to help all our church members to understand who they truly are - as children of a loving heavenly Father - and to be wary of many external and internal influences that try to squeeze them into a mould.” A same-sex couple in church would be treated the same as a straight couple, i.e. they are expected not to insensitively display physical affection. The community believes that “full sexual openness should be reserved within a covenant relationship... So we encourage all members - gay or straight - to be in a covenant relationship (marriage or civil partnership) before initiating sexual intercourse.” Married gay couples are welcome, although the church cannot legally conduct same-sex marriages.

As a busy, active church there have been LGBT individuals involved in various ministries; however “since the C of E currently considers that the Bible supports straight sex only, we would require that anyone involved (or seeking) active sexual relationship could not have a teaching role in church unless they were straight. Whilst some of us are conservative in our view of Scripture, we consider that the Bible position on gay sex is very debatable, so respect that people can hold different views with integrity. We hold very highly the principle of being true to one's conscience, and encourage people to be tolerant of those who differ.”

Anglican-Methodist Local Ecumenical Partnership

St Andrew’s Psalter Lane  
This church is part of the Inclusive Church network. They “would hope to offer a warm welcome to all students… irrespective of their sexual orientation”. A struggling student would be listened to and affirmed: “as a child of God, made in God’s image”. This would be no different if the person was in a same-sex relationship. The person filling out the survey stated that they cannot speak for everyone within the congregation, but “the church community as a whole would be very willing to consider the arguments supporting same-sex marriage, and I think it likely that a large proportion would take an affirmative view”.“ Sexual orientation and practice and gender identity should have no bearing on the holding of positions of responsibility” so any LGBT+ student could take on roles of responsibility, if desired.

Methodist

The Beacon Broomhill (including the Junction student worship)  
The church says that The Junction (evening congregation for students) “has had a number of openly gay students, and it has never been an issue for anyone. Lesbian and gay students have been participants and leaders, in the worshipping, administrative and social lives of the… congregation.” The morning congregation is described as older and typically welcoming and inclusive, “although it is hard to answer definitively for all members. There are also occasionally international students and visitors from cultural contexts where same-sex relationships may be less accepted.” The Junction is described as being definitely welcoming to a trans\* student; so would the morning congregation although they might be less certain of how to react.

Should a person be struggling with their sexual and gender identity, they would be supported in their situation (including their theological position) and positively affirmed; often students would be referred to specialist services at the university or beyond. In the past, students have been signposted to ‘Diverse Church’ (an online community for LGBT Christians) and the University Chaplaincy.

With regard to community views on same-sex marriage, “There is no officially held position. The Junction (student congregation) would typically be supportive of equal marriage rights. The morning congregation is probably split between those who are supportive, and those who may be accepting of same-sex relationships, but whose understanding of marriage is more traditional.” The policy of the Methodist Church is that LGBT members and ministers are valued and welcomed, at all levels of church life, including those in same-sex partnerships or marriages.

Wesley Hall Crookes  
Wesley Hall says that they “expect that anyone turning up at our services or other activities will be warmly welcomed as a person in their own right, and humbly believe that we are a loving and accepting church.” The church does not have a lot of experience with trans\* students, but will consistently value and welcome people. Students who are struggling would be advised to speak to the University Multifaith Chaplaincy.

In regards to same-sex relationships, there may be a range of opinions. The Methodist Church in Britain does not yet conduct same-sex marriages but is currently undergoing a consultation on that matter. The church writes “whilst some members of our local congregation are comfortable with same-sex marriages, others believe that the theological concept of marriage does not apply to same-sex couples”.

The person filling out this survey is unsure about how the congregation would react if someone openly LGBT+ would serve in a role of leadership as this has not been the case so far; however, their understanding of the concept ‘church’ relies on “many varied and complimentary roles and responsibilities rather than a ‘top-down’ leadership”.

Pentecostal/Assemblies of God

RCCG The Royal Assembly Sheffield

Everyone is welcome at this place of worship. For struggling students, “There is a counsellor who will.be able to help them.” If a student in a same-sex relationship wants to be part of the community, the church “will let them understand our statement of Faith. If they happy they can be encouraged to be part of our church community.” The community believes same-sex marriage is not Bible-based and therefore does not support it. To qualify to hold a role of responsibility, they have to accept “Jesus as Lord and Saviour if they they do they will be baptised by immersion. Thereafter they can serve in a place of responsibility.”

Roman Catholic

The Sheffield Universities Catholic Chaplaincy

Openly LGBT students are “made to feel welcome in the community and are able to become involved in the life of the community as they wish”. There are trans\* students and students in same-sex relationships and “this is not held against them by other members of the community”. The Catholic Church does not accept same-sex marriage, as it is against Catholic teaching. Openly LGBT+ students “would be able to serve in a position of responsibility at the Catholic Chaplaincy on the same basis as everyone else”. If the Chaplaincy was approached by a struggling student, they would be advised to accept themselves how they are – for that is how God accepts them. They would be advised to live as a Catholic Christian to the best of their ability.

Unitarian

Fulwood Old Chapel (Unitarian Chapel)  
The response from Fulwood Old Chapel wanted to “convey that people who would identify themselves as members of the LGBT+ community are welcome. When we say 'Welcome' we really, truly, actually mean it!” They added that, “all people are welcome” and “We would not 'react' in any different manner if the person were LGBT+ (openly or not) or in a relationship with someone of the same or different gender. This naturally includes those who are transgender. Such matters would not prevent access to a position of responsibility.”

Same-sex marriages are possible and seen positively within the Unitarian Church, the church in Fulwood however has not yet discussed whether to do so, or not. In regards as to whether and how the church would advise someone should they struggle with their gender or sexual identity, it was stated that it would depend on the situation but that pastoral care is offered “as we are able to”.

**Hinduism**

Hindu Samaj Sheffield  
This community appreciates “everybody's choice in their life as long as they believe in GOD and Peace.” With regard to advising a struggling student, the person completing the survey said that they would “explain the purpose of life. Gender or their sexual behaviour is personal. We would not comment or bar the person. It is their personal choice.” This would also be true if the person was in a same-sex relationship. Over all, community opinion is against same-sex marriage, but the person completing the survey takes a liberal position. An openly LGBT+ student would be able to serve in a place of responsibility should they wish to do so.

**Judaism**

Sheffield District Reformed Jewish Group  
Openly LGBT\* students would be welcome in this community; and openly gay, lesbian and bisexual students have often been part of it. If a student was struggling with aspects of their gender identity or sexual orientation, the community would “seek to be supportive and refer the person to appropriate support” if needed.   
A student in a same-sex relationship would also be welcomed; the movement is supportive of gay-marriage

Jewish modern-orthodox congregation

A lesbian, gay or bisexual student would be welcomed in this place of worship, however security checks would be undertaken as they do with all newcomers. A trans student would be treated in exactly the same way. If a student was struggling with their sexual or gender identity, it would depend who they spoke to for advise in regards as to how they would be advised. Same-sex marriage is not recognised in this community; however, any LGBT+ student would be able to take on a role of responsibility should they wish to, the only requirement is that they need to be a member of the synagogue.