The University of Essex LGBT+ Forum is inclusive and welcomes all University of Essex staff and PhD students who identify as LGBT+ and who are committed to the aims of the Forum - regardless of whether they're out at work, or not.

The Forum provides a visible LGBT+ presence on our campuses to ensure we create and maintain a safe, inclusive environment in which we can all reach our full potential without fear of harassment or discrimination.

The Forum is self-organising but works in partnership with senior management at the University to ensure that the views and needs of LGBT+ staff are recognised and a working environment is created that encourages a culture of respect and equality for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

As a network, we are inclusive of people with multiple identities, and we aim to work with other staff networks to collaborate on areas such as gender, race and disability. We strive to provide a safe and confidential space for all members of the LGBT+ community.

Terms of reference

The aims of the group are:

- To provide a safe, confidential, and supportive environment for staff who identify as LGBT+ to meet and share experiences, opinions and concerns. This includes physical meetings, mailing list and event invites.
- To provide confidential support to all LGBT+ identified employees on LGBT+ issues.
- To provide networking, encouragement and peer support to LGBT+ staff.
- To be a visible group that can inform and influence the University’s approach to LGBT+ issues by contributing experience, expertise and ideas.
- To promote the interests of LGBT+ staff employed at the University of Essex.
- To raise awareness of LGBT+ issues at the University.
- To celebrate significant events in LGBT culture and history.
- To promote education and knowledge sharing, empowering champions and equipping allies with information and confidence to challenge incidents of discrimination or harassment.
To provide a forum to discuss issues related to LGBT+ staff at the University and identify ways of challenging discrimination and stereotyping amongst colleagues, peers, students, visitors and stakeholders.

To act as a consultation forum for the University of Essex Human Resources Department during the development of new and existing policies through strong links with the Equality and Diversity Team.

To contribute to staff development activities and training in LGBT+ related areas.

To support the University’s application to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.

To identify good practice internally and externally from appropriate sources and provide links with external LGBT communities, groups and organisations.

To communicate information and updates about LGBT+ events and resources to Forum members.

To liaise with other staff networks and groups (i.e. LGBT+ Allies, Essex LGBT+ Alliance, Access Forum, Womens’ Network) to support intersectionality.

Membership and meetings

The Forum is organised by a small group of volunteer co-ordinators in addition to two Network Chairs that act as liaisons for the group with senior University staff and Human Resources. The group is self-managed and non-University driven. We are always looking for new members and voluntary coordinators to give a small amount of time to help manage the Forum and represent the Forum at events.

The majority of meetings are informal and held approximately once a month, usually during lunchtime. Dates, times and venue details of meetings are circulated using the Forum mailing list. Membership of the mailing list and the informal group meetings (approximately once every 4-6 weeks) are open to all staff and PhD students at the University of Essex that identify as LGBT+, whether they are out or not.

Some events and socials will also be open to all staff, friends and family of network members, or members of the LGBT+ allies. These events will be clearly labelled as “open” to protect the identities of those members who may not be out to colleagues, friends, or family members.

We encourage and welcome suggestions for discussion topics for future network meetings and value input from members to help shape the group.
- The group will aim to have regular meetings throughout the year, with video link between campuses.
- The group will aim to organise at least one social event per term, potentially in partnership with the Allies.
- Any member of staff who attends a meeting or joins the mailing list is considered a member of the Forum, unless they explicitly choose to opt out of membership.
- Mailing lists and Outlook invites will be monitored by the elected officers to ensure the confidentiality of the group’s members is protected. Members with concerns around confidentiality may broach these with the Network Chairs.

Members of the Network are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect, in line with the University's Zero Tolerance Approach and Acceptable Behaviour Policy. Members are asked to respect the confidentiality of colleagues, since attendance at Forum meetings or being part of the Forum mailing list does not imply that any individual is open about their LGBT+ identity within the wider University.