

Supporting transgender employees in the work setting

An employee undergoing gender reassignment contacted HR to ask for advice for themselves and their line manager about how they should manage the process in the workplace and what support was available.

Background

An employee undergoing gender reassignment contacted HR to ask for advice for themselves and their line manager about how they should manage the process in the workplace and what support was available. An example of some of the questions that needed to be considered were:

- What information should be given to colleagues?
- What personal records need to be updated and when?
- How should information be given?
- Who should tell colleagues if appropriate?
- How do we inform clients (in this case young people) and what should they be told?
- How do we inform colleagues and clients whilst maintaining the privacy and dignity of the individual undergoing gender reassignment?
- What other support does the individual need during the transition process?

- What other guidance might the line manager need?
- What help can be provided by the Employee Assistance Programme?

WSCC had some guidance originally drafted for the Gender Reassignment Act 2004 but this was felt to be out of date and not fit for the purpose now required.

What we wanted to achieve

The decision to commence gender reassignment is a difficult and often stressful one. It was important that our guidance recognised this and enabled the line manager to support the individual with sensitivity. In this particular case this was even more critical considering the individual works with young people.

We also wanted to produce a guide that would raise awareness, and challenge myths and assumptions associated with gender dysphoria.

We wanted to demonstrate to our Transgender employees that they are valued and we would support them to remain in their employment. It is not uncommon for an individual undertaking gender reassignment to leave their existing employment to go to another job in their new identity. Research has shown that employees who have made this decision can find it difficult to find other comparable work. This can lead to social exclusion, isolation and ill health due to depression.

“ Our aim is to ensure that the person is supported whilst working at WSCC and as a valued member of staff irrespective of their gender identity and that they were supported to do so. ”

What we did

Aaron Gumbrell, was asked by Laura Mullins to undertake research to produce an advice and guidance document. He carried out research to help understand in more detail the subject of gender reassignment and to ascertain best practice and support for someone undergoing this process as an employee in WSCC. Research was guided in part by the questions raised by the individual employee concerned. The research included resources such as case studies and useful Youtube videos.

However it was also important to understand the legal context of both the Equality Act (2010) and also Data Protection (1998). Once we understood this we were then able to focus on the personal and human aspect of what an individual might be experiencing in the workplace whilst undergoing reassignment. We wanted to learn what this could mean as well as anticipate some of the opportunities, concerns and barriers that could occur and to enable us to reduce any negative experiences that a person might encounter. We included signposts to support available for the employee outside of work e.g. signposting to local support and network groups.

Myth busting was an integral part of the guidance that has been produced. Understanding the different language and people's misconceptions about what it means to change gender identity is an essential aspect of the guidance.

Gender dysphoria is a medical condition whereby the person believes that their gender identity is different to their own perception. This can happen at birth when the person's gender is decided at birth where it is not obvious which gender the person is and they can be allocated the incorrect gender.

We needed to consider how we would inform customers. Some of the research highlighted organisations and training that could support us to plan and do this if necessary. Who needs to know what, will vary considerably according to the workplace setting and so the guidance needed to offer a range of support to accommodate the specific context of the case. For example, working in an office based role will require a very different approach to a social worker working with clients.

We shared this document with the employee undergoing gender reassignment, their line manager, WSCC LGBT staff group, Unison and other HR colleagues, to ensure that the advice was relevant, realistic and would provide the necessary support to the individual during transition and afterwards.

What we achieved

WSCC HR produced a comprehensive document for members of staff who undergo gender reassignment and line managers so that they feel fully supported.

Early feedback from employees and managers indicate that this is a valuable resource that will help people during a difficult period in their life. This document has also helped to raise awareness of gender reassignment issues and challenge misconceptions. The document was officially launched on Transgender Day of Remembrance when the Transgender Flag was flown at our main office buildings.

The individual who initially asked for advice wrote:

“ I appreciate all the thoughtfulness and work that you put into getting the guidance in place and the efforts you have made to improve the experience for transgender employees in West Sussex. This is a significant achievement and will I'm sure make a very real difference. ”

This process helped us to understand the language and impact that gender dysphoria can have on a person's life and what we needed to do to support them.

Gender reassignment can be a long and stressful process. There are times when the medical profession are unable to provide emotional/psychological support leaving the individual feeling even more vulnerable. As an employer we have an opportunity to promote one-to-one confidential counselling through our employee assistance programme.

Just having the guidance available demonstrates our commitment to our Transgender employees. These employees have valuable skills and experience that we need to retain. In addition by helping our employees understand the issues for their Transgender colleagues, we are also raising awareness with staff who may have Transgender clients.

“ Having a better understanding about the process of gender reassignment has taught me and others that there are many facets to be considered. Having this awareness not only supports the individual but the people working alongside in a way that the person does not feel they have to leave their current employment to start afresh somewhere new. It means we can keep a valued employee and provide them with the support they need. ”

**Aaron Gumbrell,
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For more information please contact

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Skills for Care Recommends

Skills for Care has produced some guidance related to equality and diversity, including inclusion of focus in inductions programmes and as part of continued professional development.

Recommendations for CQC Providers Guide

This comprehensive guide helps Registered Managers to comply with CQC expectations around various areas of workforce development, including the inclusion of equality and diversity focus in all inductions.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/cqc

Skill selector

Focus on equality and diversity forms part of a number of national Health and Social Care vocational qualifications. The Skill Selector helps employers and individuals choose qualification focus appropriate to their role.

skillselector.skillsforcare.org.uk

Common core strategic principles for equality and diversity

This provides a framework to support leaders in adult social care to consistently make sure that equality and diversity issues are both central to strategic decision-making and embedded at all levels of their organisations.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/equalityanddiversity

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