



National
College of
Ireland

*Examining Equity, Diversity, and
Inclusion practices within Irish
based organisations: Exploring EDI
through the perspectives of LGBTQ+
employees*

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MA Human Resource Management

Submitted to Nation College of Ireland, August 2022

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National College of Ireland
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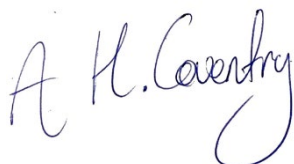
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Abstract

This study explores the perceptions of LGBTQ+ employees, based in Ireland, towards their employer's equity, diversity, and inclusion policies. Current research suggests that the rates of discrimination aimed at the LGBTQ+ community are increasing. The same can be said for the workplaces of Ireland, where LGBTQ+ employees are far more likely to face some form of discrimination when compared to their non-LGBTQ+ co-workers.

The research was gathered using primary data from 25 participants. Using the primary method ensured that the results would be first-hand and original to the dissertation. The data was collected through the use of a survey, which was shared across social media sites, namely Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, by LGBTQ+ organisations such as Gay Health Network (GHN), LGBT Ireland, and OutWest. The collected data was analysed by utilising qualitative research methods, and thematic analysis, which helped in highlighting any commonalities that arose between the research survey and the literature review.

Some of the trends noticed in the research conducted were the rise in discrimination, a need for an actual HR department, and the requirement for LGBTQ+ specific policies, all of which relate to topics discussed throughout the literature review.

The research question, and the research objectives, have been answered, and an overall conclusion to the dissertation would indicate that the research performed via survey does reflect the current external research being conducted on the LGBTQ+ community and workforce of Ireland.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Amanda Kracen, for providing brilliant guidance, feedback, and assistance throughout the thesis writing process.

Secondly, I want to say thanks to all the participants that have shared and taken part in the research for this thesis.

Thirdly, I would like to give a very big thank you to my family and friends for being a great source of support and encouragement! You've all been the absolute best!

Lastly, I want to give a very special mention to my mam and my nanny. I would not be who I am, or where I am today, without their unwavering support.

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1. Introduction

The dissertation will be centred around the area of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Debate has been noticed on whether the 'E' in EDI should stand for equality, or if it should represent equity. Equality in the workplace means to treat all employees the same, regardless of age, race, gender identity, physical ability, sexual orientation, etc., while giving all employees the same tools and supports to complete their tasks. On the other hand, equity in the workplace may similarly treat all employees the same, but it also recognises that the circumstances of each employee may differ, and thus, allows extra tools and supports to those employees that will enable them to reach an equivalent outcome to that of their colleagues.

While equality is quite important, equity was the unequivocal choice to cover for this dissertation. Equity is about offering individuals what they need, whether that be additional resources, or more time or focus, proportional to their situations. Address specific issues that specific communities, or individuals, may have (Daniels, 2021).

The aim of the dissertation is to achieve a better understanding of the EDI policies and practices of organisations based in Ireland, while also gaining more knowledge into how those identifying within the LGBTQ+ community feel they are supported in the workplace. LGBTQ+ is an acronym used for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, with the plus symbol representing various other identities. Do employees within this community think that their employers could do more for EDI? Is it felt that strengthened diversification is needed in the workplace? Workplace diversity means to acknowledge differences in the employee base and distinguish the advantages of having a range of viewpoints in the workforce. Workplace inclusion means to allow employee differences to be valued and have all employees feel a sense of belonging and appreciation (CIPD, 2021).

In the original proposal for this dissertation the idea was to focus on Dublin as the sole geographical location for participants of the coinciding survey. Upon further study, it was realised that a better understanding could be gained by broadening the geographical research area to the entirety of Ireland as, for example, the experiences of a gay man working in Dublin could completely differ to that of the experiences of a gay man working in Limerick.

This topic is worthy of study due to the increasing rates of harassment and bullying in the workplace. Workplace bullying accounts for 1.7 million lost workdays a year across Ireland

and is experienced by one-in-ten people (Cullinan and Hodgins, 2021). This topic is worthy of study because organisations and employers need to realise that action must be taken to ensure that all employees feel safe, seen, and heard in the workplace.

The research aims of undertaking this study will be to examine the perspectives of LGBTQ+ employees in terms of the EDI practices of Irish based organisations. The research objectives of this study are to gain understanding into how LGBTQ+ employees view the effectiveness of their employer's EDI policies in supporting them, and to examine if LGBTQ+ employees would add, remove, or modify any EDI policies of their employers.

The structure of this dissertation piece will include the exploration the topic detailed above while also discussing the research question, the methodology used, how the data collected was analysed, the findings of the research, as well as an overall discussion of, and conclusion to the dissertation. Before that can be done, it is vital to gain an understanding of the topic through studying current research and conducting literature reviews. In the literature review section, topics such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland and the Irish marriage equality act will be reviewed. An examination and comparison into what the Irish government have done for the LGBTQ+ citizens of Ireland versus their employers will also take place.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of conducting this literature review is to study the relevant literature and information available, based within Ireland, that focuses on LGBTQ+ people in the workplace. As Ireland has a small population, and to allow a better understanding of EDI, literature from around the world will also be reviewed and taken into consideration. It is hoped that by comparing Ireland's stance on EDI aimed towards the LGBTQ+ community, it will depict the areas in which the Irish government and organisations are flourishing, while also highlighting the areas that need drastic improvement.

Within the first six months of 2022, a great deal has happened in the United Kingdom and the United States of America that affect the rights and lives of LGBTQ+ people. As this is such an important topic, the happenings within the UK and US will be the focus of discussion and comparison to Ireland. Even though both countries differ from Ireland in terms of population

size, all three countries are predominantly English speaking and categorised as first world countries, which should allow for comparison.

2.2 Ireland

Ireland has had a complicated history with homosexuality and the LGBTQ+ community. In fact, it has only been within the last 30 to 35 years that progress, although slow, is being made with LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms. In 1989, the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act was amended to protect LGBTQ+ individuals in Ireland and in 1993, the Unfair Dismissal Act of 1977 was amended to include sexual orientation, making it illegal to remove an individual from their job solely for being LGBTQ+. It was not until June 1993 that 'sexual activity between men' was decriminalised with the introduction of the Sexual Offences Bill 1993 (McDonagh, 2017).

On 22nd May 2015, approximately 22 years since homosexuality was decriminalised, Ireland became the very first country globally to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote. All but one of Ireland's 42 constituencies, approximately 1,202,200 people, 62% of the voting population, had voted in favour of the Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Act 2015 (Hand, 2015).

As stated in the Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015, discrimination centred on nine distinctive bases is unlawful. These bases are gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age (applicable only to persons aged 18 or older), disability, race, and membership of the Traveller community (Government of Ireland, 2022).

There are various factors within those nine bases which are visible, such as a person's skin colour, or a disability needing the use of a wheelchair, and others that are non-visible such as a person's sexual orientation, or if they are neurodivergent (have an alternative thinking pattern, or way of solving tasks), the term is mostly used to describe people with dyslexia, autism, or ADHD.

Literature pertaining to the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in Ireland is quite sparse. From a legal perspective, it is known that employees cannot be discriminated against or fired from their jobs if they identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. However, it is also known that discrimination still occurs in workplaces across Ireland.

In a report published by The Department of Justice and Equality, entitled '*National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019 – 2021*', then Minister for Justice and Equality noted that LGBTQ+ individuals continue to encounter intolerable levels of harassment and prejudice in some workplaces (Flanagan, 2019).

As parts of the world become more accepting places for the LGBTQ+ community, with new laws and legislations being put in place across the world to protect the rights of those that identify as part of the community, more could be done from an organisation point of view. Organisations, especially smaller or less established ones, should be clear and upfront with their EDI practices and use them as a selling point and a pull factor for both current and potential employees. The businesses of Ireland are mostly made up of small-and-medium sized enterprises (SMEs). These SMEs tend to have an absence of HR teams or EDI policies aimed towards LGBTQ+ employees, when compared to larger organisations (Stonewall and O'Reilly, 2019a).

The majority of research that has been, or is currently being carried out, mainly focuses on LGBTQ+ harassment and bullying at school level. This is encouraging to note as any anti-discrimination ideas established for children in schools can help to reduce workplace discrimination incidents when these children grow and enter the work environment. A great deal more can be done by Irish organisations to retrain and reskill their employees to lessen discrimination. The emergence of specific businesses that aid organisations with EDI has begun. One such business in Ireland is The Irish Centre for Diversity which state their ability as supporting and advising organisations on all aspects of EDI (Irish Centre for Diversity, 2022).

In an article, titled '*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Careers and Human Resource Development: A Systematic Literature Review*', published in 2015, the author notes that some great limitations exist to the area of study and research regarding LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace. For example, the author suggests that the focus of the research he conducted revolved around the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, stating that there is not enough research on the career experiences of other LGBTQ+ identities, such as transgender (gender identity differs from the one allotted at birth), or non-binary (an umbrella term used to describe any gender identify that is not within the female or male binary).

The author continues to note that, from the studies he has conducted, it can be perceived that those involved in Human Resource Development are majorly concerned with boosting value for shareholders but were lacking when it came to implementing positive ideas that could either cost money or negatively affect growth or profits in some fashion. Despite this, if organisations implemented policies that are LGBTQ+ friendly, the benefits can include enhanced efficiency amongst LGBTQ+ employees, better recruitment, and an overall stronger image for the organisation or brand (McFadden, 2015).

A noteworthy source in relation to LGBTQ+ workplace experiences would be a report published by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) in 2014. GLEN was an Irish LGBTQ+ group based in Dublin and advocating for equality. The group was founded in 1988 and closed in 2017. In the report, titled *'Working It Out: Driving Business Excellence by understanding Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual'*, a series of responses from LGBTQ+ individuals regarding a survey surrounding workplace experiences were examined. The report notes that the number of transgender responses to the survey were inadequate, and thus, due to the limited information, chose to focus on sexual orientation alone (GLEN, 2014). This occurrence can also be seen regarding the accompanying survey conducted for this thesis research.

This source is worth highlighting as it is one of the only reports found during the literature review that focuses solely on LGBTQ+ people in the workplace through an Irish perspective. However, the report was released in 2014, and based on a research survey conducted in 2011. Considering over 10 years have passed since the survey and given how rapidly the landscape of DEI is changing, the results of said survey could be quite out-of-date when examined through a 2022 viewpoint.

While Irish organisations and the Irish government are adapting and making positive changes, for the most part, in relation to DEI, conversion therapy is still technically legal in Ireland. This will be discussed in comparison to the UK in the subsequent section, along with a review examining the history, politics, and workplace policies affecting LGBTQ+ people of the UK.

2.3 United Kingdom

Conversion therapy, also referred to as 'gay cure therapy' by some groups, sets out to try and alter an individual's sexual or gender identity. Extreme forms of this pseudoscience include torture tactics such as food and sleep deprivation, and physical violence. There is no evidence

to state that sexual orientation or gender identity can be changed. Organisations such as the Health Service Executive (HSE) in Ireland, and the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK have described conversion therapies as unethical, ineffective, and harmful.

Roderic O’Gorman, the Irish Green Party Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, has stated that a ban on conversion therapy will happen in Ireland and that no one will be left behind. No one being left behind is in reference to the UK’s own ban on these therapies, which exclude transgender people. The minister went on to say that the UK’s trans-exclusionary ban is a tactic being used by the current UK government to win favour with certain groups (Kelleher and Pink News, 2022).

While cisgendered lesbian women and gay men enjoy more freedoms now than they would have even 10 years ago, the same cannot be said for transgender individuals. The rights of transgender people are often a topic of debate for cisgender law makers; should trans people be allowed to join the military? Should they compete in sports or in the Olympics? The debate even trickles down to what bathroom transgender people can use. All this discussion takes place without allowing actual transgender voices and opinions to be heard.

The same can also be said for workplace environments. Transgender people within the employment sector often face discrimination and a good deal of valuable work must be done to aid transgender people in feeling safe in their workplace without fear of repercussion for expressing themselves (Ozturk and Tatli, 2016).

According to Ciphir, a UK based business that delivers HR solutions, 40% of those in full time employment and 45% of those in part time employment in the UK have experienced a form of workplace discrimination. From those that experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation, the results of the survey conveyed that Sales, Media, & Marketing, and the Arts & Culture sectors were the highest ranked discriminators with 21% and 19% respectively (Ciphir, 2021).

Information released by the UK police forces state that transphobic attacks rose to a three year high in the summer of 2020, while homophobic assaults in the UK continued to rise year-on-year from 2019 to 2021, with a dramatic increase noticed in 2021 after lockdown restrictions were eased. Other incidences of note include religious based attacks on the LGBTQ+ community stating the pandemic was a direct result of their existence, while other

attacks were a result of the link associated between gay men to the HIV Aids pandemic (Chao-Fong and The Guardian, 2021). From the statistics released by Ciphir and the UK police forces, it is clear to see those occurrences of hate towards the LGBTQ+ community are steadily on the rise, both in the workplace and in public spaces.

As with Ireland, the UK has a complex history with the LGBTQ+ community. Some prime examples can be seen in the remnants of homophobic laws within Commonwealth countries, the implementation of Section 28 by the Thatcher government in the late 1980s, and the prevalence of racism and homophobia in football, the UK's most popular sport. A recent study of online abuse faced by players in the Euro 2020 and Africa Cup of Nations 2022 finals express that the majority of abuse received was homophobic at 40%, while racist abuse was a close second at 38% (FIFA, 2022).

In 1990, history was made when Justin Fashanu announced his sexuality and became the first openly gay male professional football player in the world. After his announcement, Fashanu suffered severe hostile responses from his colleagues, including his manager, football fans, and his own family (Magrath, 2017). Unable to secure a professional contract as an openly gay player, Fashanu retired from professional football in 1997. In 1998, a year after his retirement, Fashanu was accused of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old male in the US. Due to the atrocious reaction, he received on account of his sexuality, Fashanu feared that he would not be given a fair trial and thus, after fleeing home to the UK, he committed suicide. The intense homophobia he faced played a major part in Fashanu's suicide (Anderson, Gaston, and Magrath, 2018).

32 years on from Fashanu's pronouncement, Jake Daniels becomes the second male football player to come out as gay. Fortunately, Daniels has received a very different response with him being praised by the Premier League and the Football Association (FA). Daniels has stated that protecting his mental health was a factor in his decision to come out (Sky Sports, 2022). Spreading positive messages regarding mental health, especially with younger members of the LGBTQ+ community, is more important than ever. A survey on LGBTQ+ youth was conducted from December 2020 to January 2021 and found that the responses revealed that LGBTQ+ youth are three times more likely to perpetrate acts of self-harm, and twice as likely to consider suicide, when compared to non-LGBTQ+ counterparts (Just Like Us, 2021).

British colonisation has also contributed to the spread of homophobic roots in the laws of Commonwealth countries. Original British laws that criminalised homosexuality, more specifically gay men, were introduced to further countries as the Commonwealth spread. There are currently 53 Commonwealth countries, most of which are former British colonies. 36 of these countries have laws in place that criminalise homosexuality and have adapted the laws to also include other sexual orientation identities (BBC, 2021).

One final piece of British history to discuss, one that lives in infamy with the UK LGBTQ+ community, is Section 28, implemented by Thatcher's government, which lasted in Scotland from 1988 to 2000, and in England & Wales from 1988 to 2003. Section 28 was a piece of legislation that prohibited education authorities from 'promoting homosexuality' within school environments. Due to the lack of cohesive wording around the legislation, teachers were uncertain as to what they could and could not discuss. As a result, confusion and fear led teachers to not discuss any topic relating to homosexuality and the LGBTQ+ community, which unfortunately also included a failure to address classroom homophobic bullying and harassment (Greenland and Nunney, 2008).

Section 28 was entirely repealed in Britain in 2003. Nevertheless, it is believed that the legislation created a ripple effect in that those having grown up and undergone schooling during this time may have become accustomed to the freedom, granted to them by Thatcher's government, to express their anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. It is entirely possible that the anti-LGBTQ+ harassment first developed during school has evolved to the workplace. This can be evidenced in the aforementioned statistics and figures released by Ciphre concerning workplace discrimination encountered by the LGBTQ+ community.

Given the above examples of the UK's past homophobia, are employers in the UK ensuring the correct policies are implemented for the present and future? According to the most current research, as reported by Adam Penman, for People Management, it would appear that despite regulations and policies, claims of LGBTQ+ discrimination persist as a crucial concern for employers. Penman continues by suggesting that employers should be proactive in upholding their LGBTQ+ employees. One example of this kind of support involves training all staff in adhering to EDI policies, and to assess their own actions, which may be construed as harassment (Penman, 2021).

Stonewall, named for the Stonewall riots, considered to be the birth of the fight for LGBTQ+ equality in the US, started as a campaign group in the UK and was founded one year and a day from the implementation of Section 28. The group has since grown into an organisation that fights for the protection of rights for all LGBTQ+ people. Similar to the Irish Centre for Diversity, Stonewall offers advice and training on inclusivity and diversity to schools, colleges, and workplaces across the UK. Stonewall releases reports on workplace discrimination and also has their own awards, Global Workplace Equality Index, which place global organisations in gold, silver or bronze categories and acknowledge the organisations for their commitment in advancing the support to inclusion and diversity in the workplace (Stonewall, 2022).

Regrettably, history does tend to repeat itself and the execution of a Bill, comparable to Section 28, has recently become a law in the state of Florida in the US.

2.4 United States of America

On 28th March 2022, the 'Parental Rights in Education' bill was signed into law in the state of Florida. This law, dubbed the 'Don't Say Gay' law by LGBTQ+ rights activists, essentially removes the teachings of any LGBTQ+ topics within schools from kindergarten to third grade, which is roughly from the age of five to eight or nine years old. This law has come under fierce scrutiny and criticism by the LGBTQ+ community and its allies. The 'Don't Say Gay' law has clear resonances of Section 28 and researchers have warned that the government of Florida should have investigated the generational damage inflicted upon the UK LGBTQ+ community as children during the period of Section 28 (Lee, 2022).

In a reprehensible trend, other states in the US have initiated the move away from progression, taking a step backwards from equality, by putting forth their own anti-LGBTQ+ bills. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), a US based organisation advocating for the liberties of LGBTQ+ people, have reported that 2022 is set to become a record-breaking year in terms of the levels of anti-LGBTQ+ bills being introduced. As of April 2022, greater than 300 LGBTQ+ discriminatory bills have been brought forward, 130 of these bills explicitly target transgender people (Berg-Brousseau, 2022). As of June 2022, a record of 25 anti-transgender bills have been signed into law. Many of these laws have been pursuing transgender youth in sports. One of the most radical bills to be submitted is from the state of Ohio. This bill proposes that any athlete accused of being transgender must undergo a DNA test, or a genital exam (Lang, 2022).

In February of 2022, a governor in Texas instructed state child welfare officials to investigate cases of gender care for transgender youth, under the age of 18, as child abuse. The Texan Supreme Court ruled in favour of this legislation but applied limitations, these being that the officials are not obligated to investigate each case as child abuse and may decide themselves, and if an investigation is to take place, the official must receive authorisation from a judge. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is currently suing the government of Texas to have this piece of legislation abolished (Larson and Brubaker Calkins, 2022). It would be remiss to not also mention the recent overturning of *Roe vs Wade*, which allowed safe abortion care, as another blow to equality and women's rights.

In June 1969, when police officers raided the Stonewall Inn in New York City, years of frustration and anger from the LGBTQ+ towards police forces were unleashed. The Stonewall riots sparked the beginning of the fight against police brutality towards LGBTQ+ people and the struggle for equality (Varga, Beck, and Thornton, 2019). In fact, two transgender women of colour, Marsha P. Johnson, and Sylvia Rivera, became prominent figures of the riots and the subsequent battles for equality. With the overturning of *Roe vs Wade*, many LGBTQ+ activists believe that *Obergefell*, the legislation of same-sex marriage, will be next, and fearing a return to pre-Stonewall era (Davidson, 2022).

When the past and present political environment of the US is examined, it grants further insight into what US based employers can do for their LGBTQ+ employees. The states considered to be blue, meaning they lean towards more left-wing liberal politics, tend to be in favour of equality and had laws in place to reflect this, whereas the states thought of as red favour right-wing conservative politics. In June 2020, the US Supreme Court ruled that employees cannot be terminated from employment for being LGBTQ+. Even though nearly half of the US previously had local laws implemented to prevent this discrimination, there was no federal law to protect LGBTQ+ employees (Higgins, 2020).

45.5% of LGBTQ+ employees have faced discrimination, or been fired, because of their LGBTQ+ identity, while 23.7% have experienced prejudice while applying for jobs. Of the LGBTQ+ employees having experienced workplace discrimination, 67.5% have witnessed bigoted jokes, comments, and slurs (Sears, Mallory, Flores, and Conron, 2021). Financial discrepancy also contributes to workplace discrimination. LGBTQ+ employees tend to be paid 90 cents for every dollar their non-LGBTQ+ counterpart earn (HRC, 2022). Whereas

transgender employees make 32% less than their cisgender [identify as the sex assigned at birth] colleagues (Baboolall, Greenberg, Obeid, and Zucker, 2021).

When an organisation states they support their LGBTQ+ employees, but their actions contradict that, it can create massive controversy and backlash. A prime example of this can be found in the Walt Disney Company, headed by current CEO Bob Chapek. Disney, a company that had placed diversity and inclusion at the forefront of its initiatives, one such initiative being more gender neutral with uniforms to support non-binary individuals, remained silent during the 'Don't Say Gay' bill debate. Only when it was discovered that the company has supplied political funding to some of the supporters of the legislation, and after receiving harsh criticism from its employees and the public, did Mr Chapek, on behalf of the organisation, oppose the bill, saying that the original approach to stay silent did not work (Whitten, 2022).

A small percentage of Disney employees in Florida organised a walk-out in protest of the CEO's slow response in denouncing the legislation, claiming Mr. Chapek only spoke out once the bill had been passed. Employees planned to protest outside of the Disney theme park in Orlando, Florida (The Guardian, 2022). Despite Disney celebrating the LGBTQ+ community by hosting Pride events in the theme parks, and selling Pride merchandise, the CEO was undermining the diversity and inclusion efforts of the company by supporting anti-LGBTQ+ politicians.

Annually, the month of June marks Global Pride Month for the LGBTQ+ community. A time for the members of this community, and their allies, to come together and celebrate who they are. More recently, it could be observed, that organisations, such as Disney, have been attempting to capitalise on the LGBTQ+ demographic through using Pride as a marketing tool.

These organisations are often criticised for changing their company logo to a rainbow themed version, and commercialising on Pride with products and merchandise. While it is good to see organisations willing to promote and celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride month, when organisations have such strong, established platforms, it is important to view what these organisations do for their LGBTQ+ employees. Does the organisation slap up a rainbow logo, only for it to be snatched down on July 1st? Or does the organisation go above and beyond to demonstrate that they are true allies to their employees all year round?

Organisations should not be involving themselves in advocacy solely for public relations purposes. Organisations should be openly collaborating with local LGBTQ+ groups to amplify the voices of the community (Stonewall and O'Reilly, 2017b)

2.5 Conclusion

A common theme seems to have appeared throughout the three countries studied for the literature review, the availability of academic research regarding the LGBTQ+ community is quite limited. To combat this, articles published by news outlets, and field professionals, such as CIPD, People Management, and Ciphre, were utilized. Though academic research was restricted, the information available regarding the LGBTQ+ employee in the UK and the US was far more accessible than with Ireland, which could be due to the size difference in population.

Another factor to consider as to why the UK and the US have more information could be that most of the knowledge gathered, such as the trans-exclusionary conversion therapy ban, and the anti-LGBTQ+ bills, occurred within the first 6 months of this year, and thus was more readily available. The recency of this information should also be considered when examining the amount of academic research presented as an insufficient amount of time has passed to allow comprehensive research to be compiled and released.

Regardless of the population size, the information gathered from all three countries appeared to depict similar notions of the increase in LGBTQ+ discrimination in workplaces. The countries greatly differed in terms of the political landscape, with Ireland proving to be the most progressive of the three for overall LGBTQ+ freedoms and rights. It was felt that to fully encapsulate what employers can do for their LGBTQ+ employees, a study into the past and the political landscape of each country would give a greater insight. It would also aid in understanding if employers were restricted by tradition, or law, in how they could, or could not, support LGBTQ+ employees.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The intention of the methodology section is to expand upon the aims and objectives of the dissertation, the overall research question to the dissertation, the data collection, and how

this data was analysed. The methodology section will also include information regarding the sample selection for the research, any ethical considerations, and the limitations to the research topic.

3.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The research aim is to examine the personal perspectives of LGBTQ+ employees in terms of the EDI practices of Irish based organisations and the significant impact that efficient EDI can have. A research objective affords direction and concentration towards the design and performance of a research plan (Brotherton, 2008). The research objectives for this dissertation are as follows:

- **Objective One:** To gain understanding into how LGBTQ+ employees view the effectiveness of their employer's EDI policies in supporting them.
- **Objective Two:** To examine if LGBTQ+ employees would add, remove, or change any of the EDI policies of their employers.

3.2.1 Research Question

A research question can be perceived as a tool that allows focus to be applied to a particular area of study (Collins and Hussey, 2014). After careful consideration of the aim and objectives of the dissertation, and the research conducted in the literature review, the central research question that will be proposed for this piece is:

'What are the thoughts and feelings of LGBTQ+ employees towards their employer's EDI policies?'

3.3 Data Collection Approach

The data needed to complete the dissertation will be obtained using the qualitative research method. Qualitative research understands the individual and societal experiences of people (Smith and Osbourne, 2008). Qualitative methodology involving the use of surveys tend to have higher response rates and creates a greater insight into the psyche of participants (Baruch and Holton, 2008).

Qualitative research was chosen as it relates to personal observations or experiences. To obtain information on the thoughts and feelings of the sample group, as per the research question, qualitative methods would be the best suited option.

3.4 Data Collection Method

Primary data refers to the type of data that is collected first-hand. Primary research, as a methodology, is utilised by researchers to collect data directly from a source, as opposed to secondary data, which relies on research that has previously been conducted (Nykiel, 2007). By collecting this type of data, it will allow a deeper understanding into the perspectives of the sample group.

3.4.1 Research Instrument

Data will be collected by use of a survey, created using Microsoft Forms, and made up of 22 questions, that will assess the participant's perception of EDI within their workplace. Social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter will be utilised to promote and share the survey, as well as contacting LGBTQ+ organisations and charities across Ireland.

The choice of survey was inspired by the work researched by of GLEN. As discussed in the literature review, a survey was conducted to study LGBTQ+ people in the Irish workplace. Other research reviewed used a face-to-face, or over the phone, interview method to obtain their data, but due to the nature of discussion regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, and discrimination, the ability to provide full anonymity through the use of survey, would yield stronger, more honest responses.

The survey research was conducted in June of 2022. As June is international Pride month, and companies tend to put their EDI policies specifically aimed at the LGBTQ+ workforce on display during this month, it was felt that LGBTQ+ employees would have an increased sense of awareness regarding the policies.

3.5 Establishing Survey Questions

This segment will revolve around the questions asked in the research survey. The survey has been constructed around the themes found in the literature review. Due to the lack of current and relevant research on the topic of LGBTQ+ people in the Irish workplace, a validated survey could not be used for this research. The research question was also kept in mind during the creation of the survey. The justification behind the self-created questions will be discussed in further detail in this segment.

Full anonymity will be guaranteed to the participants as neither their name, nor their employer organisation's name, will be asked for. The first question of the survey acts as an agreement to the privacy terms, set forth in the information piece accompanying the survey, as participants can only proceed if they select the yes option. However, the participants will be asked to provide their age range, the Irish county in which they work, provide their gender identity, and provide their identify within the LGBTQ+ community. As a means to avoid any bias or accidental discrimination towards gender or LGBTQ+ identity, participants were given the option to type in their own answers for these questions.

Encouraged by the Ciphre research, as discussed in the literature review, subsection *United Kingdom*, participants were asked to provide the industry in which their profession is based, i.e., Retail, Hospitality and Tourism, or Healthcare, and to state if they are working on a fulltime or parttime basis, as it may provide some additional insight into if one sector or industry emphasise the use of EDI practices over another.

The Stonewall report from 2018, mentioned in the *United Kingdom* subsection, informed the question regarding if the participant is open with their LGBTQ+ identify in the workplace. The same report, as well as the work from C. Flanagan, examined in the *Ireland* subsection of the literature review, motivated the questions asking if the participant has experienced discrimination in their current role, or any former roles. To gain additional understanding into this, the participant, if they had faced discrimination, was then asked to describe how the instance was handled.

The author of this dissertation was inspired by their own personal experiences to ask if the participant, before applying for a job, would research the hiring company's stance on EDI. This is something that the author would do themselves and thus was curious to know if other members of the LGBTQ+ community also did so. A subsequent question was then asked to examine if the participant would continue the job application if the hiring company's EDI stance was not shared.

In order to gain further insight into the participant's workplace, they were asked if they feel their workplace is diverse, and if their employers have any EDI policies in place that are specific to LGBTQ+ employees. Participants were then asked to rank, from one (poor or strongly disagree) to five (excellent or strongly agree), their industry and employer in various aspects relating to the feeling of safety, and acceptance.

In the concluding questions of the survey, participants were asked to suggest what they feel their employer could do to attract more LGBTQ+ employees, would there be anything they would change or add to their employer's EDI policies, and if there was anything else that they would like to comment on.

3.5.1 Pilot Study

As the questions in the research survey were created with the literature review in mind, a pilot study was conducted to ensure that all questions were comprehensible, grammatically correct, and could be completed within the reasonable timeframe of five to ten minutes. Feedback was received from friends and colleagues that allowed improvements to be made upon the survey prior to it being made accessible to public participants.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method used to detect, establish, and offer perception into themes that develop throughout a dataset. This method can aid a researcher in recognising the interrelationships within a certain topic's discussion, and in comprehending these commonalities (Braun and Clarke, 2012). As this dissertation research centres around the thoughts and feelings of LGBTQ+ employees, the use of thematic analysis would suit the data collected quite well as themes will need to be identified from the conducted research in order to establish any corresponding responses from the research participants.

The data was also analysed through the use of Microsoft Forms and Excel. The survey was created using Microsoft Forms which allows the researcher to view the data being collected as bar charts, pie charts, and word clouds which display the more commonly used words from the participant's answers with the most often used words being shown as larger. The data collected can then be exported to an Excel spreadsheet which divides data based upon each question asked.

3.7 Sample Selection

The target population chosen for the research must have the capability of relating to the topic and the objectives of the study (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). As a result, the sample group criteria selected for this research would be anyone that is in fulltime or parttime

employment, within any industry or sector based in Ireland, over the age of 18, and identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

To guarantee the likelihood of finding participants that meet the required criteria, the method of convenience sampling was utilised. Convenience sampling refers to the method of using the sampling techniques on hand, such as the use of links, QR codes, or sharing on social media. Convenience sampling proved to be quite a useful technique as LGBTQ+ charities, organisations, and publications were contacted via social media and asked to aid in the distribution of the research survey for this dissertation, thus ensuring a higher reach to the desired population.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

A completed NCI ethics form was submitted prior to conducting research and no hesitant feedback towards any ethical issues was received. Participants will not be faced with any ethical issues, or risk of harm or distress by engaging with the research survey. All information handled will be strictly confidential and adhere to the NCI guidelines. Anonymity will be guaranteed to all participants.

The relevant information that a participant may need prior to participating in the study will be displayed before the commencement of the survey. The information will include that the study is completely voluntary and that they do not have to answer any question they are not comfortable answering. Participants will also need to select an option to express agreement and acceptance of the information provided before they can access the survey.

3.9 Limitations to Research

There may be some limitations in terms of collecting information pertaining to gender identity or sexual orientation, as some participants could be reluctant to share this information. To counter this, emphasis will be applied on the anonymity factors. There will also be a typing option to answer these questions that will permit participants to write their own answers, allowing for complete inclusion. Any data collected will be handled with the strictest confidentiality. Storage and sharing of the collected data will adhere to the NCI guidelines.

Another limitation to the research is the relatively small population size of Ireland. The data needed for this research had to come from the LGBTQ+ community, a minority group.

Collecting data from a minority group of an already small overall population size will present some limitations to research and access to the target sample selection.

3.10 Conclusion

The purpose of this section was to present a more in-depth assessment as to the methodology behind this dissertation. A brief synopsis of this section demonstrates that the aim and the objectives have been laid out, the research question has been identified, qualitative research was chosen as the data collection approach, primary data was selected as the data collection method, the justification and reasoning behind the survey questions has been discussed, the data will be evaluated through thematic analysis, the sample selection has been recognised, and any ethical considerations, or research limitations, have been deliberated.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to present the collected data from the survey responses. As discussed in the above section, the research aim is to examine the viewpoints of LGBTQ+ employee towards their workplace EDI policies, and the objectives are to find current examples of EDI polices in Irish organisations, to examine how LGBTQ+ employees view the efficacy of these policies, and to determine if LGBTQ+ employees would add, or remove any policies. It is through these findings that the answers to the research question, aim, and objectives are found. The existence of pertinent themes will also be examined in this section.

In total, the survey received 25 responses. The survey participant responses come from various industries, and have a healthy blend of industries, gender, and LGBTQ+ identities. Despite the moderate sample size, and mix of identities and industries, common themes emerged regarding how the participants feel about their employer's EDI policies

The findings are analysed meticulously in respect of the main research question, the aim and objectives, and the existing study surrounding this topic. To portray the validity of the research, links will be drawn to present exploration of the topic that will allow for the discussion, comparison, and contrast.

4.2 Analysis of Research Survey Participants

A total of 25 participants voluntarily contributed to the research survey, all of which suited the desired sample selection and thus were eligible for the research. This section will give an overview of the participants' backgrounds.

4.2.1 Age Profile

The age profile of participants varied, as can be seen below, represented by a pie chart, in *Figure 1*. Unfortunately, zero responses were received from the 18 to 24 age demographics, and only one response was received for the ages of 55 and above. This can sway the results of the survey as it is not a clear representation of the total sample selection. A further breakdown of the participants shows that 4% are aged 55 and above, 32% are aged 45 to 54, 24% are aged 35 to 44, and the majority of participants, at 40%, are aged 25 to 34. With more time, and further resources, the survey would be released again with specific focus on the less represented demographics.

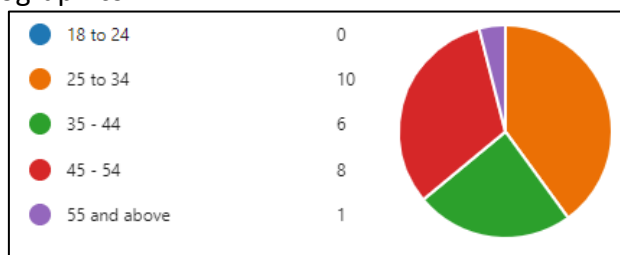


Figure 1 – Age Profile of Participants

4.2.2 Gender Identity

The participants' gender identities have been composed into a word cloud, formulated by Microsoft Forms, seen below in *Figure 2*. The word cloud identified the most commonly used words in the participants' answers. To clarify the word cloud, 12 (48%) participants stated that they identify as female, nine (36%) identify as male, three (12%) identify as non-binary, or agender, and one (4%) identifies as a transgender female. As participants were given the option to type in their own answers for this section, to avoid any accidental gender discrimination, the use of similar terms, such a female or woman, were used, which partially skews the word cloud as can be seen in *Figure 2*.

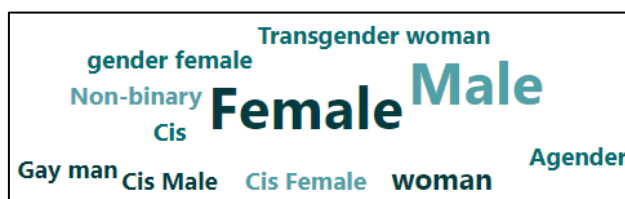


Figure 2 - Gender Identity

4.2.3 Identity within the LGBTQ+ Community

The LGBTQ+ identities of the participants were also arranged into a word cloud, seen below in *Figure 3*. As with the gender identities, the issue of similar terms being used arose. For example, the use of ‘gay female’, instead of lesbian, skewed the word cloud data as the term ‘gay male’ was also used thus, according to the word cloud, 16 participants identify as gay. There was also one participant that identified themselves as an ‘ostracised outsider’, and another that answered with a question mark.

As the data was also extracted to an Excel file, an easier view of the data breakdown was obtained. 11 (44%) participants identified as lesbian, nine (36%) identify as gay, one (4%) identifies as bisexual, one (4%) identifies as asexual, one (4%) identifies as pansexual, and two (8%) chose not to provide an answer.



Figure 3 - LGBTQ+ Identity

4.2.4 Industry of Work

This question was put forward to participants to establish which sector, or industry, they work in. By the collection of this data, it was envisioned that themes would form, and an idea of which industries apply more efforts to EDI would be identified. *Figure 4* shows the word cloud from Microsoft Forms, while *Figure 5* shows the information constructed into a table. As can be seen in *Figure 5* below, the survey reached participants from 13 different industries, with one participant failing to state their industry.

Industry	Participants
Healthcare (to include nursing and healthcare communications)	4 (16%)
Public Sector (to include Civil Service and Government)	3 (12%)
Hospitality (to include service and customer care)	3 (12%)
Education (to include school and higher education)	2 (8%)
Data Science (to include research)	2 (8%)
Human Resources	2 (8%)
IT	2 (8%)
NGO (Non-governmental organisations)	1 (4%)
Manufacturing	1 (4%)
Supply Chain	1 (4%)
Travel	1 (4%)
Social Care	1 (4%)
Arts	1 (4%)
Did not state	1 (4%)

Figure 5 - Industry of Work - Table



Figure 4 - Industry of Work – Word Cloud

4.2.5 Location of Work

Similar to the industry of work question, this question was posed to participants to examine if there are any links existing between the location of employments and the attitude towards EDI. If working from home, participants were asked to provide the county in which their organisation's head office is based. Unsurprisingly, just under half of all survey participants came from Dublin, with 12 (48%) responses. Cork had two (12%) responses, Limerick, and Donegal had two (8%) responses each, Kerry, and Clare both had one (4%) participant, and two (8%) participants listed Ireland as their answer. Visual representation of the data can be seen below in *Figure 6*.



Figure 6 - Location of Work

4.2.6 Working Hours

Participants were asked if they are currently working fulltime or parttime. This was asked as parttime employees often work less hours, thus spending less time in the organisation which may skew their perceptions of the employer and the policies. 22 (88%) participants work fulltime, while three (12%) work parttime. This data is represented below in *Figure 7*.

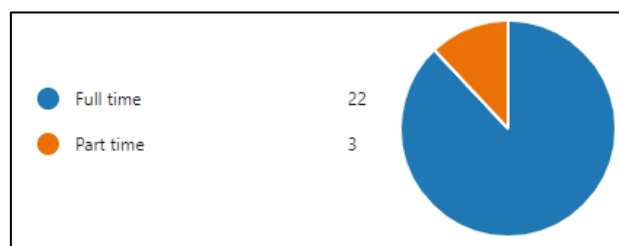


Figure 7 - Working Hours

4.3 Themes

In this segment, the themes that have arisen throughout the analysis of the findings will be identified. Six predominant themes have been discovered.

4.3.1 Lack of Transgender Representation

The majority of survey participants were gay men and lesbian women. Only one participant identified as transgender. The lack of non-cisgender representation was also a common theme found in the literature review. However, from the research survey 24% (six

participants), roughly one quarter of the responses, had some mention of increasing positive policies for transgender colleagues. As the majority of those that commented on this are cisgender, it could be surmised that there has been an increase in awareness surrounding the discriminatory attitude towards trans employees.

4.3.2 The Need for Human Resources & Diversity

When discussion turned towards the area of discrimination, some participants noted that an actual HR department, or even a single HR representative, is of vital need in their workplaces. Feedback suggests that the majority of discrimination cases, as mentioned by the participants themselves, are handled by management 'wearing a different hat'.

The need for diversity was also noted as a reoccurring theme. When asked if they felt like their workplace had a diverse employee base, 44% (11 participants) answered yes, while 56% (14 participants) answered no. Of those that answered no, 22% (three participants) work in the public sector, 14.5% (two participants) work in IT, and Education respectively, and 7% (one participant) work in the remaining industries of healthcare, hospitality, supply chain, HR, travel, NGO, and arts correspondingly. All responses from those working in IT and the public sector said they feel their workplace is not diverse.

4.3.3 Workplace Discrimination

When asked if they had ever experienced discrimination in any of their previous workplaces, 36% (nine participants) answered yes, whereas 64% (16 participants) answered no. When asked the same question in relation to their current workplace, 32% (eight participants) answered yes, and 68% (17 participants) responded no. Those participants that have experienced discrimination were then asked to describe how it was handled. The following are sub-themes that arose from the responses:

- **Lack of Handling:** When the case of discrimination was reported the participant requested to not work with said colleague in the future. The manager pushed it aside, ignored it, and told the participant to 'grow up'
- **Not Reporting:** One participant's case went unreported as they felt their type of discrimination was very subtle and would not be taken seriously.
- **Transphobia:** A response involves deadnaming and being shunned socially. Deadnaming refers to when a transgender person is called by the name they used

before coming out or transitioning. The deadname is usually associated with a gender, thus demeans the person's gender identity and journey.

- **Management:** Management play a vital role in enforcing correct policies and procedures. The majority of discrimination incidents stated by the participants revolve around management either refusing to handle the issue or also being directly involved and taking part in the discrimination. One response mentions that the manager's son was the source of their discrimination and, as the manager was not going to fire their son, the participant had to leave their job as the situation became intolerable.

4.3.4 LGBTQ+ Specific Policies

When asked if their employer has any specific EDI policies in place for LGBTQ+ employees, 56% (14 participants) responded yes, whereas 44% (11 participants) answered no. One response from a gay male working in the education industry stated that his organisation is only now beginning to consider LGBTQ+ people in their policies. He mentions that the institution has been a very heteronormative cisgender workplace with very few inclusion policies.

The same participant noted, when asked what their organisation could do to attract more LGBTQ+ people, that there should be LGBTQ+ people in EDI positions, and on core workplace committees. Another response noted that establishing actual LGBTQ+ friendly policies, and not employing 'bigots', would be a good starting point.

4.3.5 The Need for LGBTQ+ Management & EDI Training

Expanding upon the point made by one of the responses in the previous theme regarding more LGBTQ+ people in EDI positions, and workplace committees, various other participants have mentioned that having LGBTQ+ employees in positions of management would help lessen the discrimination they face.

It is also felt that compulsory EDI training needs to be undertaken by all staff, including management, as there is a complete lack of awareness surrounding the prejudiced language used in the workplace. One participant, identifying as queer, using she/they pronouns, and working in the Arts sector, noted that the language used in their presence is deplorable and is often associated with gender-based violence. Another response, from a participant identifying as a gay woman working in the healthcare industry, states that the workplace is

still not a safe space or LGBTQ+ people. This person has felt the need to censor their personality as a means of protecting herself and not drawing attention.

This specific area of research could be taken further, and with the emergence of organisations such as the Irish Centre for Diversity, it is hoped that real change can be made in Irish workplaces in the not-too-distant future.

4.4 Findings from Scale Questions

Other questions in the survey were posed to participants in a scale, or ranking, format, with one being poor, or strongly disagree, and five being excellent, or strongly agree. The questions were as follows:

- *How would you rate the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in your industry as a whole?* – The average score for this question was 3.6. The most popular answer for this question, with 11 responses, was rank 4, followed closely by rank 3, with ten responses.
- *How would you agree with the following statement - I think my company has great policies in place to support LGBTQ+ employees.* – The average score for this question was 3. The most popular response was rank 3, with 10 answers, followed by rank 1, with 6 answers. This corresponds with the previously mentioned theme of needing LGBTQ+ specific policies.
- *How would you agree with the following statement - I feel safe in expressing my identity in my workplace.* – The median result for this question was 3.6. This question had more positive results as the most popular answer was rank 4, with ten responses, followed by rank 5, with six responses.

From the results of the scale questions, it can be seen that those participants that have not experience discrimination in their current workplace ranked each question higher, as opposed to those that have. Also worthy of note is that participants committed to ranking either high or low. There was no fluctuation in ranks from participants.

4.5 Conclusion

To summarise this section, analysis was conducted on the survey participants themselves as a means to further understand the responses received and potentially create a more

developed insight into the participants. Going by the data collected, it has been estimated that the average participant to the research survey is a lesbian woman, aged between 25 to 34, working fulltime in Dublin. No conclusion could be made regarding the industry in which they work as the responses cited numerous industries.

From the themes discovered, it can be established that LGBTQ+ employees still face prejudice in the workplace, there is a lack of a HR presence, and diversity in the workplace, there are very minimal resources available for transgender employees, there is a great need for LGBTQ+ in management positions, and for EDI training, vast improvements need to be made in relation to LGBTQ+ specific EDI policies, and LGBTQ+ people research a company's EDI policies before applying for jobs.

5 Discussion

In this section, the findings of the research survey will be linked back to the previous research conducted throughout the literature review section. Commonalities to the previous research will be discussed, along with any new findings that were not discovered during the literature review. The answers given by participants in the research survey will also undergo a deeper assessment and comparison to fully utilise all of the data collected.

5.1 Commonalities in Research Survey and Literature Review

5.1.1 Discrimination

One of the least surprising commonalities found between the research survey and the literature review was the rates of discrimination faced by participants. All three countries studied in the literature review have had increased rates of workplace bigotry. The UK also noted the rise in anti-LGBTQ+ public attacks. This topic was not researched during the survey, but perhaps if the research was to be conducted again, or on a larger scale, a question regarding this could possibly be asked as a means of comparison to public and workplace discrimination.

48% (12 participants) of those surveyed have experienced some form of discrimination from either their current, or former employer. Seven responses (58%) identify as female, three responses (25%) identify as male, one response (8.5%) identifies as a transgender woman, and one other response did not state their identity. A question posed, as discussed in the

Findings from Scale Questions segment of the above section, participants were asked to rank their perception of the acceptability of LGBTQ+ people in their current industry. Of those that ranked their industry highly, 14 participants (64%) have not experienced discrimination in their current workplace. It could be concluded that the lack of discriminatory behaviour towards the participant can portray a different view of their industry.

5.1.2 Absence of HR & Need for EDI Training

A link between the research survey and literature review for these topics can be found in the discussion between Stonewall and O'Reilly, as discussed in the *Ireland* section in the literature review, SMEs are lacking a HR presence and EDI policies, when compared to larger organisations. As also previously discussed, specific organisations with the aim for training other businesses in terms of EDI, the Irish Institute of Diversity, and Stonewall, being prime examples for Ireland and the UK, respectively.

Feedback from those participants mentioning the lack of a HR department, state that their complaints are not handled sufficiently. The correct people, with the necessary training and expertise, are not being sought out to handle these complaints with the sensitivity and discretion needed. If the research survey was to be completed again, participants would be directly asked if their workplace has HR representation.

5.1.3 The Need for Transgender Awareness & Support

This was quite a frequent topic discussed throughout the literature review and in the research survey responses. The works researched in the literature review, namely McFadden (2015), GLEN (2015), and Ozturk and Tatli (2016), all discuss the need for stronger transgender representation, and supportive policies in the workplace. The bulk of LGBTQ+ protections are mostly focused on the lesbian, gay, and bisexual members of the community, with other identities being left in the dark.

With the anti-transgender rhetoric emerging from some states within the US, support of the trans community is vital. As previously mentioned, 24% of participants, that identify as cisgender, mentioned the need for increased policies and protections for their trans colleagues. One participant also spoke about the normalisation of pronoun use in email signatures and on desk spaces where names would be displayed. Another commented on the need for improved healthcare policies for their trans colleagues. The implementation of

gender-neutral toilets in the workplace was also mentioned as something that employers should consider in the future.

5.2 Completing the Research Objectives

As previously discussed, there are two research objectives for this dissertation. This segment will examine if the objectives have been met by cross examining the objectives with the survey results.

Objective one was to gain insight into an LGBTQ+ employee's perceptions of their employer's EDI policies. This objective was examined under questions 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, and 19 of the research survey, which can be seen in *Appendix One*. These questions were asked as a means of delving further into the opinions of the participants. For question 17, participants were asked to provide their level of agreement, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), towards their thoughts regarding if their current employer has great policies in place for LGBTQ+ employees.

Of the 25 participants, ten responses rated their agreement to this question as 3, meaning they had a neutral opinion of the policies, six responses rated 1, five responses rated 4, three responses rated 5, and one response rated 2. This information shows that seven participants disagree, eight participants agree, and ten participants felt neutral regarding the statement in question 17.

Of the participants that rated their agreement as 4, or 5, only one participant suffered workplace prejudice. Of those that rated 1, or 2, all participants were subjected to workplace bigotry, with 4 responses showing that the discrimination happened at their current place of work. Of those that rated 3, four have faced discrimination in work, of which three responses showed this happened in their current employment, and six participants never had experienced workplace discrimination.

A conclusion to this objective that can be drawn is that opinions are subjective and likely to change based upon an individual's experiences. The objective was to achieve an understanding of EDI from an LGBTQ+ employee's viewpoint, which, going by the data found in the research survey responses, the majority of LGBTQ+ employees do not feel overly supported, or under supported by their employer. It would seem that 40% have no firm opinion of their employer's EDI, whereas 32% feel positively, and 28% feel negatively.

Objective two was to study if LGBTQ+ employees would adapt their employer's EDI policies in some way. This objective was examined under questions 19, 20, and 21 of the research survey, which can be seen in *Appendix One*. These questions were asked to allow the participants to freely discuss what they think of their employer's policies. The participants had the opportunity to discuss what they did, or did not, like. Many of the results to this question have been discussed throughout the dissertation, particularly in the *Themes* subsection, such as the need for HR representation, LGBTQ+ focused policies, and the requirement for increased supports for transgender employees.

A more in-depth analysis shows other responses that did not emerge as themes. Specifically, from participants that identify as female, the mention of hostile language, not only homophobic, but sexist. From the data collected, dignity at work seems to be lacking. There was also a mention of HR policies receiving a pronoun update as the language used is not inclusive to all. Another change mentioned would be the addition of a confidential reporting system in organisation deficient of a HR presence. In one interesting answer provided to this question, the participant mentioned that they did not want to feel included or safe; they just want to do the job they were hired to do in peace.

A conclusion to this objective can be seen in the responses of the research survey. 52% (13 participants) said that they would adapt their employer's EDI policies in some way. As the majority of participants would make changes, this should be noted by employers and set as a priority for their organisations. Even making small, positive changes to aid EDI, such as the pronoun updates, would be a great starting point in change the perceptions of LGBTQ+ employees.

5.3 Potential New Insights

One question that the author of this dissertation was keen to examine the results of was regarding if, before applying for a new job, would the participant research a hiring company's stance on EDI. This particular topic was not explored in any of the research conducted throughout the literature review. The author was inquisitive about this question as, due to personal experiences, this is something that the author would do. Curiously, during practice trials of the survey, when this question was posed to non-LGBTQ+ friends, and colleagues, the answer was a resounding no.

72% (18 participants) replied with yes, while 28% (seven participants) answered no. As a follow up question, participants were then asked if the hiring company does not share their EDI stance, would they still continue with the job application. 60% (15 participants) responded no, whereas 40% (ten participants) answered yes.

Of those that answered yes to researching a hiring company, eight (45%) identify as male, six (33%) identify as female, two (11%) identify as non-binary, or agender, one (5.5%) identifies as a transgender woman, and one (5.5%) did not state and LGBTQ+ identity.

This topic would make an interesting sole research project as it can affect different aspects of HR, including recruitment, and employee retention. It would yield fascinating results to conduct this question on a larger number of participants, including non-LGBTQ+ individuals, and then compare the data between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Conclusions have been made for each section throughout the dissertation. The overall conclusion that can be drawn to this dissertation is that discrimination and an anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric is growing, both politically and in the workplace. Organisations need a vital overhaul of their policies and examine what is, or is not working, for their employees. The themes that have emerged from the research survey coincide with the finding of the literature review. In review, the research survey would have ideally received a higher number of participants from other identities within the LGBTQ+ community, such as transgender, asexual, and non-binary individuals. A broader reach and a more varied sexual orientation base would yield stronger, more accurate, results to the general LGBTQ+ population.

In hindsight, if the research survey were to be conducted again, an additional question asking if the participant's workplace has a form of HR representation, would be included. This way a link could be made between the rates of discrimination and the lack of a HR presence.

The aim of this dissertation was to answer the research question '*What are the thoughts and feelings of LGBTQ+ employees towards their employer's EDI policies?*'. It is believed that this research question has been answered. The results from the research survey provide an insight into the perceptions of Irish based LGBTQ+ people. From this survey, the participants provide

a varied selection of results with 28% being dissatisfied, 32% being satisfied, and 40% having no strong opinions either way. It can be concluded that the thoughts and feelings of LGBTQ+ employees are subject to change based on their experiences in the workplace. This proves that employers have a major impact upon their employee's perceptions, and without the proper policies in place, poor retention rates will begin to increase, and, as LGBTQ+ people are increasingly researching the policies of hiring companies, it can also affect recruitment.

6.2 Recommendations

The results of the study show that transgender people are not being treated with the care, support, and respect that everyone deserves. From the research conducted, cisgender LGB individuals are calling out for change and the recognition of their transgender community members. Vast improvements must be made with the Irish employment industry that will cater for everyone, especially those in an already marginalised group.

Although this research was focused on the LGBTQ+ community, the original proposal for this dissertation was to also study women, and people of colour in the workplace. After careful consideration, it would have proven to be an immense undertaking to study all three groups, However, it may provide thought provoking finds to research the EDI experiences of women, or people of colour, and then compare these findings to the experiences of straight, white, cisgender men.

One particular question from the research survey, pertaining to if LGBTQ+ people explore a hiring company's EDI policies before applying for a job, would make for an interesting sole research topic. From practice research, when this question was posed to non-LGBTQ+ people, the answer was almost always no. It would be interesting to take this research further and to examine how it would affect recruitment and job attraction.

As part of the CIPD requirement, costings and timeframes need to be considered for the recommendations. Of course, each employer is different and thus will have different budgetary concerns and time scales that will affect the implementation of appropriate EDI changes. However, as a simple steppingstone in the right direction, employers could try to listen to what their employees have to say, take advice from actual people that the policies affect, and if a workplace does not have an EDI group, then the employers can start by creating one from a volunteer base of employees. Employers, particularly SMEs, as discussed

by Stonewall and O'Reilly, need to adapt, and focus on EDI as awareness surrounding the topic is only increasing. Simple, free initiatives, such as normalising pronouns around the workplace, would be the best place to start and show employees that the organisation is willing to change and adapt to create a safe space for all employees.

Personal Learning Statement

In order to meet CIPD requirements, the inclusion of a personal learning statement is a mandatory component. The task of researching and writing a dissertation appeared daunting at first thought. However, once my survey went live and I began to see responses coming through from genuine individuals, I became enthusiastic to fully embrace the dissertation challenge.

EDI has always been an interest of mine, and as a member myself, the focus on the LGBTQ+ community just seemed right. As mentioned in the Conclusion and Recommendations section, the original proposal also included women and people of colour, but after much deliberation, as I am not a woman or person of colour, it did not seem right to add another white male voice to a discussion that did not belong to me.

Having survey responses come through that reflected my own thoughts was somewhat validating to my own experiences. I am only beginning my career in Human Resources, but I fully intend to embrace the area of EDI as a specified carer field for myself.

The biggest challenge of this dissertation would be the literature review, purely due to the amount of anti-LGBTQ+ content. The discussion is vital for the progression of equality for LGBTQ+ people because if we do not learn from our past, we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes, e.g., Section 28 and Florida. When examining the history of inequality, the rates of discrimination, and the present amplified anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in politics, especially in the US, the subject matter becomes quite heavy and can take a toll.

On the other hand, having viewed all this, it has greatly inspired me to further progress my career towards EDI. From the research gathered on Ireland, it is clear that there is a lot more research that needs to be done on this topic within this country and it would be fascinating to be at the forefront.

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Appendix One – Table of Research Survey Questions

Research Survey Questions	
Q 1	Do you consent to voluntarily participate in this survey, and understand that all information gathered will be anonymous?
Q 2	Please select your age range
Q 3	Which county in Ireland are you based in for work?
Q 4	How would you describe your gender identity?
Q 5	How would you describe your identity within the LGBTQ+ Community?
Q 6	Are you currently working fulltime or parttime?
Q 7	Please note the industry in which you work
Q 8	Are you open with your LGBTQ+ identity in your current workplace?
Q 9	Have you experienced discrimination in your current workplace due to being LGBTQ+?
Q 10	Have you ever experienced discrimination in any of your previous workplaces due to being LGBTQ+?
Q 11	If you have experienced discrimination in the workplace, could you please describe how it was handled?
Q 12	Before applying for a new job, would you look up the hiring company's stance on EDI?
Q 13	If a hiring company does not share their stance on EDI, would you continue a job application with them?
Q 14	Do you feel your workplace has a diverse employee base?
Q 15	Does your workplace have any specific EDI policies in place for LGBTQ+ employees?

Q 16	*How would you rate the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in your industry as a whole?
Q 17	*How would you agree with the following statement - I think my company has great policies in place to support LGBTQ+ employees
Q 18	*How would you agree with the following statement - I feel safe in expressing my identity in my workplace
Q 19	Do you think your employer could be doing more to support their LGBTQ+ employees?
Q 20	What do you think your employer could do to attract more LGBTQ+ people to the company?
Q 21	If you could, is there anything you would change or add to your workplace policies that would make you feel more included?
Q 22	Is there anything else you would like to comment on that you feel could help in understanding your answers?

*Scale questions

Dissertation Survey

Exploring Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion through the perspectives of LGBTQ+ Employees

The aim of this survey is to gather information on EDI practices of employers from the point of view of LGBTQ+ employees.

This survey should take roughly five minutes, with a couple of questions being opinion based. There are no wrong answers - I'm just looking to understand your individual experience as an LGBTQ+ employee.

Please scan the QR code or click the link to participate

All responses are greatly appreciated!
All participants are kept completely anonymous

