



SPEAKING UP FOR OUR FUTURE

Manifesto for Scotland's LGBTQ+ Young People 2026 - 2031



INTRODUCTION

“I think at the very core of it all, we just want to be able to live our lives without permanent scrutiny and fear of attack.”

Young Person at LGBTYS

Young people are increasingly concerned that LGBTQ+ rights are regressing - both in Scotland, and on a global scale. This manifesto reflects the views and experiences of LGBTQ+ young people across Scotland. It details what matters most to them during the expected parliamentary terms of 2026-2031.

Since the last Scottish Election, young people feel the world has become a less inclusive and safe space to live in. Many of our asks have not changed since 2021, as little, if any, progress has been made.

Young people have clearly told us that they need a government that will stand up for them and their rights. They urgently need services to support them, and protection to live authentically as LGBTQ+ people. Young people's asks align with the LGBTQ+ sector manifesto and where appropriate, partner manifestos such as YouthLink Scotland, Scottish Youth Parliament and more.

A note on terminology

LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning; the positive '+' aims to represent and respect everyone within the LGBTQ+ community. When we surveyed our young people, they told us this was the term that best reflects them.

We want the term 'LGBTQ+' to be interpreted in the inclusive way it is meant. At LGBT Youth Scotland, we welcome the full diversity of the LGBTQ+ community and include intersex, asexual and non-binary people within this umbrella, whilst also being mindful that people can have multiple identities that intersect.

01

Representation

Rebuild a culture of inclusion in Scottish Parliament and in media, actively challenging anti-LGBTQ+ narrative. Integrate LGBTQ+ representation and lived experience into all areas of work.

02

Rights and a Safe Society

Support LGBTQ+ young people's access to their rights through maximising implementation of the UNCRC, recognising an entitlement to youth work, safeguarding LGBTQ+ young people against hate and supporting them to stand up for their rights.

03

Trans Rights and Gender-Affirming Healthcare

Promote the safety and wellbeing of trans young people, including ensuring a maximally inclusive implementation of the Supreme Court Ruling in For Women Scotland vs. Scottish Ministers in April 2025. Improve access and reduce waiting lists to NHS gender-affirming care.

04

Mental Healthcare

Invest in adequate mental healthcare provision, improve pathways to accessing mental healthcare, and address structural inequalities faced by LGBTQ+ young people in mental healthcare settings.

05

Education

Continue and renew a commitment to education free from discrimination for all LGBTQ+ learners, commit to inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics in RSHP, and ensure trans and non-binary pupils are supported on a whole-school level.

06

Domestic and Familial Abuse

Develop a national strategy and fund specialist services to support LGBTQ+ people who have been affected by domestic or familial abuse. Recognise the specific risks of familial abuse in legislation and policy.

07

Other Asks

LGBTQ+ young people also told us about a number of other areas they care about - in particular, intersectional support for those experiencing multiple marginalisation. They also want to see better LGBTQ+ inclusion across healthcare and in sports.

“The government need to set an example for talking respectfully about queer people and treating the queer community as cisgender and straight people are treated.”

Young Person at LGBTYS



Overwhelmingly, LGBTQ+ young people do not feel that their lives are respected or represented by decision makers or the media. Not a single young person we spoke with said they feel accurately represented by the Scottish Government. Young people were clear about the impact of this: it's making them feel alone, powerless and scared:

"I think [this misrepresentation] reduces understanding of our community and increases distrust, hate, and misunderstandings, which leads to less support available, fewer safe spaces, and worse mental health."

Young people routinely see dehumanising and LGBTQ+ phobic narrative allowed to play out. Negative and inflammatory media coverage around trans identities has sharply risen, whilst trans voices remain seldom heard.

This narrative is not being challenged by the Government in Parliament, in the media or on the street. Young people have been clear to us that disrespectful discourse within Scottish Parliament, regarding their identities and their lives, has been a leading factor in increased LGBTQ+ misrepresentation. In their words, they feel "demonised".

There are key decisions that have been made in Scotland that enormously impact LGBTQ+ young people's lives, such as the implementation of the Cass review and the Supreme Court ruling in *For Women Scotland vs. Scottish Ministers* in April 2025.

LGBTQ+ young people feel their voices were very poorly represented in these decisions; their safety and dignity have suffered as a result.

Young people have asked that the new Scottish Government:

- ➔ Actively and continually demonstrate how it's in Scotland's best interests to ensure everyone feels invested in their own rights and the rights of others to build a sense of safety for all minority communities.
- ➔ Rebuild a culture of inclusion in Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament through strongly encouraging all MSPs to treat their colleagues and constituents with respect, dignity and courtesy - especially when there are different viewpoints.
- ➔ Integrate representation of LGBTQ+ identities, and all minorities, into all areas of work; including legislation and policy, public statements, conduct of MSPs, and approaches to Scotland's biggest challenges.
- ➔ Include the voices and lived experience of LGBTQ+ young people in the development of legislation, decisions that affect them, and public service delivery.

02 RIGHTS AND A SAFE SOCIETY

“There are so many huge things that need to change, I struggle to know how I would feel safe.”

Young Person at LGBTYS



LGBTQ+ young people are feeling increasingly unsafe in our society. Some young people reported that they often have little or no hope of ever feeling safe in Scotland.

The last parliamentary term saw a reduction in funding for inclusive spaces at a time when young people need them most. There is a particular lack of LGBTQ+ friendly spaces in rural areas and in sports. We need specific spaces for LGBTQ+ young people, as well as more inclusive spaces for all, so that young people feel included everywhere.

Only one third of the young people we spoke to felt that their rights to health, education, privacy, and assembly and expression were being upheld. Nearly 50% said that their right to health was not realised.

Many told us how overlapping forms of marginalisation impacted their rights. For example, young people find it particularly difficult to access their rights as an LGBTQ+ person with disabilities, from an minority ethnic group, as a refugee or person seeking asylum, or experiencing homelessness.

Young LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugees highlighted feeling vulnerable and experiencing damage to their health due to uncertainty that their human rights will be upheld:

"[The uncertainty and fear] eats away at the mind. It becomes impossible to relax, impossible to sleep peacefully, impossible to feel stable. The idea that "you can be deported anytime" is not just a policy risk, it is a psychological wound."

LGBTQ+ young people also told us that they feel there are limitations on their privacy and their freedom to peacefully protest:

"My privacy is ripped away by people as they assume they have the right to ask inappropriate question because I'm disabled and because I'm trans."

"Our right to protest has been severely diminished."

In parallel with this, young people still lack confidence and motivation to report hate crime. Many have had experiences of being disbelieved or disrespected by authorities, and young people seldom feel that meaningful action is taken:

“[I am left] feeling as if my existence matters less than those of heterosexual and cisgender people”

Scottish Government, local authorities and public bodies must ensure rights and safety for LGBTQ+ young people are realised - and be held accountable if they are not.

Young people have asked that the new Scottish Government:

→ Take an intersectional approach towards maximising the implementation of the UNCRC for LGBTQ+ children, working with young people to develop accessible feedback and accountability procedures for UNCRC compliance.

- Ensure there are Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impacts Assessments conducted on legislation in progress, and on policy that impacts LGBTQ+ young people.

→ Recognise an entitlement to youth work for all young people, supported by long-term, sustainable funding for youth work - including increasing provision in rural areas and for under-supported groups such as New Scots.

→ Progress a Human Rights Bill.

→ Safeguard against hate: creating pathways where it is safe to contact the relevant authorities; challenging inaccurate media reporting; leading the way to develop ethical standards.

- Ensure all staff involved in hate crime reporting pathways are sensitive to, and knowledgeable about, the impact of hate crime on LGBTQ+ people and other marginalised and minoritised identities, and people with intersecting protected characteristics.

→ End the repression of LGBTQ+ young people’s voices when they are peacefully standing up for their rights, and work to ensure that all young people have greater access to knowledge about their rights.

03 TRANS RIGHTS AND GENDER AFFIRMING HEALTHCARE

“The system is failing us. The general system is failing trans people actively every day and trans people are losing their lives due to incompetence around the care needed.”

Young Person at LGBTYS



"We are seen as expendable."

Young trans people feel strongly that their human rights are being actively removed. Specifically, young people referenced the impact of the Supreme Court 2025 ruling, and the impact of the Cass Review 2024. The latter resulted in NHS Scotland halting access to gender-affirming hormones for trans and non-binary young people aged 17 and under.

Many trans young people feel that the government is not taking an evidence-based, human rights approach to decision making. Instead, they believe that trans people are being used as scapegoats – exploited by government and media to score points in debates:

"Government rhetoric also spread to [the] views of average people in community."

Young people told us that these developments have led to increased transphobia, resulting in trans young people being harmed by violence and discrimination. They're experiencing growing fear and anxiety in their daily lives.

Further effects of transphobia include the reduction and removal of services that previously supported trans young people, and limitations to their access to public spaces:

"Now a large portion of people are intent on removing trans people's most basic existence in public spaces."

Non-binary young people highlighted that a lack of gender-neutral facilities prevents them from integrating safely into society. They are also impacted by a lack of legal recognition of their genders, which affects their access to their rights.

Gender-Affirming Healthcare

Access to healthcare is a basic human right. Article 24 of the UNCRC lays out clearly that children and young people should have access to the highest attainable standards of health. Trans young people have told us they are unable to access this right: some feel it is explicitly denied:

"Because there's a lack of care for trans people, it's not seen as 'life saving'!"

Even with years of investment to address systemic issues, the situation is not improving. Young people, sometimes experiencing intensely distressing gender dysphoria, say that they face **"extreme medical gatekeeping"** and **"a complete lack of support due to waiting times."**

There is no provision for access to gender-affirming care in local communities, and right now, the waiting times for a young person under 17 mean they will be unable to access gender services in Scotland until they are an adult. For 18-25 year olds, waiting times are a postcode lottery - those awaiting services at the Sandyford clinic have little hope of ever receiving support. This is significantly worse than at the start of the last parliamentary term in 2021.

Young people have asked that the new Scottish Government:



Champion trans young people's equality and human rights:

- Have a zero-tolerance approach towards trans-exclusionary language and behaviour within the Scottish Parliament.
- Promote the safety and wellbeing of trans young people by choosing the most inclusive, lawful option in all new legislation and national policies - ensuring a maximally inclusive implementation of the Supreme Court ruling, to uphold young people's rights - and encourage other public bodies and duty-bearers to do the same.
- Be forthright about situations where you would choose to act differently if not constrained by the impacts of the Supreme Court ruling.



Use a multi-faceted approach to ensure that robust, evidence-based healthcare decisions are made, involving those with lived experience in all stages of policy making, with in-depth equality and UNCRC impact assessments.



Champion creative solutions to tackle structural inequalities in NHS gender-affirming care provision:

- Continue to implement recommendations from Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) Gender Identity Healthcare standards for Adults and Young People.
- Ensure that the Children and Young Peoples Gender Identity Healthcare Target Operating Model recommendation of decentralising provision of youth clinics is taken forward.



Increase reliable and consistent information around gender-affirming care for those accessing it, those providing it, and the general public.

“I feel like it is viewed as acceptable if I fall through the gaps.”

Young Person at LGBTYS

LGBTQ+ young people experience poorer mental health than the general population - 9 in 10 respondents in our *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People 2022* research reported mental health struggles.

It is important to note that mental health difficulties are not caused by LGBTQ+ identities, but by the inequalities LGBTQ+ people face. They live with additional stress in all aspects of their lives, due to discrimination, social isolation, and worries about personal safety.

LGBTQ+ young people told us that there is a lack of recognition in healthcare systems of the additional barriers that they experience, making it hard to access appropriate support. They felt that healthcare professionals are not adequately trained to understand and meet their needs.

Young people also told us that they had faced discrimination from healthcare providers because of their LGBTQ+ identities. Worryingly, they feel that support for their health and wellbeing is seen as 'optional' by healthcare providers, often due to unconscious prejudice, and that they are left to manage by themselves.



Young people have asked that the new Scottish Government:

- Commit to a national and well-resourced approach to improving mental health outcomes for young people.

Where relevant, these asks should be applied to all healthcare provision:

- Invest in adequately funded mental health provision across Scotland to meet rising needs from young people, addressing unequal local provision and dangerous waiting list times.
 - Develop support pathways for young people on CAMHS or adult mental health service waiting lists and those who do not meet referral criteria, ensuring they don't feel that they are alone.
 - Work with Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Higher Education establishments, and NHS Delivery to implement mandatory LGBTQ+ inclusive education in healthcare professional training courses and for practicing healthcare professionals.

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- Support clear and accessible routes for complaints and feedback, with transparent and responsive disciplinary procedures.

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- Address structural inequalities young people face, such as protecting data autonomy, management and control through modifications to data systems. Advocate for inclusive data systems and healthcare resources.

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- Strengthen prevention measures, including support for LGBTQ+ specific youth work outside and within formal education settings.

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- Trial first responders with specialist roles in mental health and wellbeing to attend people in crisis.

“I have diagnosed social anxiety which stops me from going to school, but a part of that is the fear of being misgendered or bullied due to who I am.”

Young Person at LGBTYS



The Scottish Government committed to implementing LGBT Inclusive Education recommendations prior to the current parliamentary term, and LGBTQ+ young people have felt some benefits from this. However, young people still frequently face homophobic, biphobic and transphobic discrimination in educational settings.

It is unacceptable for a single young person to face discrimination at school, in college, or at university, yet most LGBTQ+ young people we spoke to shared such experiences. They had faced violence, verbal discrimination (including misgendering), isolation, systems which excluded them, and a lack of access to basic facilities like toilets:

“I used to get called the f-slur and the d-slur on the daily at mainstream school.”

Young people did not feel they had sufficient access to LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual health and relationship information to make informed and safe choices - or even to be aware of LGBTQ+ identities. Information they did receive was often unhelpful and outdated:

“As an LGBTQ+ young person, sex education is not aimed towards us and we don't know how to protect ourselves really.”

They also feel that their wellbeing is regarded as less important than the wellbeing of their cisgender and heterosexual peers, and told us prejudice-based discrimination is often disregarded in an attempt to prevent escalation. Discrimination negatively affects LGBTQ+ young people's mental health and educational attainment.

Young people have asked that the new Scottish Government:

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- ➔ Recognising the positive steps taken by the implementation of the LGBT Inclusive Education recommendations, the government must commit to the delivery of the full 33 recommendations in a timely manner, to tackle systemic homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in schools.
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- ➔ Commit to LGBTQ+ lives and relationships being accurately and appropriately taught about in RSHP for all young people, in consultation with LGBTQ+ learners and in line with the Curriculum for Excellence and the NSPCC's 'Read, Write, Relationships' campaign.
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- ➔ Continue and renew a commitment to education free from discrimination for all learners, with a proactive approach towards tackling prejudice-based bullying:
 - Commit to funding and supporting nationwide LGBTQ+ training for all school staff.
 - Continue to implement a consistent approach to recording incidents in line with Respect for All, so that no instance of prejudice-based bullying is ignored.
 - Work alongside General Teaching Council Scotland's teaching standards on local authority inclusive policy creation, to ensure staff do not perpetuate discrimination based on a person's LGBTQ+ identity.
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- ➔ Ensure that the 'Supporting Transgender Pupils' guidance undergoes comprehensive Equality and UNCRC Impact Assessments, and that a whole-school experience approach to the inclusion of trans non-binary learners is taken.
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- ➔ Provide adequate and dedicated funding for the provision of suitable toilet and changing facilities that cater to all students, including trans and non-binary young people.

“Familial abuse needs to be recognised and treated as seriously as domestic abuse.”

Young Person at LGBTYS



Domestic and familial abuse are ongoing and serious issues for LGBTQ+ young people. Survivors say they face isolation and unclear avenues for support. Young LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic abuse reported a lack of informed and inclusive places to get support, resulting in isolation and personal hardship. They also told us they need more accessible information about what to do if they experience domestic or familial abuse:

“[Survivors need] safe places to go to such as youth groups or teachers, who they can report this to and be taken care of and seen for who they are.”

LGBTQ+ young people say they need more education in schools about what abuse in LGBTQ+ relationships can look like, and where they can get support. They clearly told us that familial abuse against LGBTQ+ young people is normalised, and they want to see laws and policies to address this.

LGBTQ+ young people call on a commitment to adopting an equity-based approach to policymaking and funding regarding domestic and familial abuse. This should prevent the perpetration of domestic and familial abuse against LGBTQ+ young people, and support LGBTQ+ survivors.

Young people have asked that the new Scottish Government:

- ➔ Develop legislation and social policy to address the specific dynamics, impact, and risks of familial abuse, similar to those in place around partner and ex-partner perpetrated domestic abuse.

- ➔ Develop a national strategy to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ people who experience domestic abuse or sexual violence.

- ➔ Fund specialist domestic abuse services to respond to LGBTQ+ survivors - in particular, gay and bisexual men, and trans and non-binary people.

- ➔ Require all local authorities to identify gaps in domestic abuse service provision and develop pathways to specialist LGBTQ+ support.

- ➔ Develop inclusive, awareness-raising campaigns that highlight the dynamics of domestic abuse in LGBTQ+ relationships.

Being LGBTQ+ can have an impact on any area of a person's life, and LGBTQ+ young people told us about a wide range of other needs which don't fit neatly within the above categories.

In particular, young people want to see stronger awareness and recognition of ways LGBTQ+ identities can interact with

other parts of a person's identity or barriers they may face. Their needs are not always met by single-issue initiatives, so young people told us they require an intersectional approach to equality and inclusion. They also want to be better included by healthcare and wellbeing services.

Young people's key additional asks are:

Multiple marginalisation

- Recognise that LGBTQ+ young people often face multiple barriers, and strengthen an intersectional approach to equality and recognition.

- Provide dedicated funding for LGBTQ+ homelessness support.

- Recognise of the disproportionate impact of the elevated cost of living on LGBTQ+ young people.

- Ensure that care-experienced LGBTQ+ young people have enhanced and dedicated support to access public services.

- Develop inclusive, awareness-raising campaigns that highlight the dynamics of domestic abuse in LGBTQ+ relationships.

- Use The Verity House Agreement 2023 to develop trauma-informed approaches that support the LGBTQ+ community, and in particular LGBTQ+ New Scots, at local level, in line with housing and care standards.

Health and Wellbeing

- Invest in policy and practice to ensure young people are given autonomy within their own healthcare.

- Work with sportscotland to tackle health inequalities for LGBTQ+ young people - ensuring equal access to activities, spaces, clubs and teams across all sports and physical activities. Support clubs and teams to take measures to implement inclusion using UNCRC, GIRFEC and the CYP (Scotland) Act 2014.

Thank You

This document was created through consultation and research with LGBTQ+ young people from all over Scotland. We'd like to thank all the young people who took the time to share their lived expertise.

We'd also like to acknowledge partners across the equalities and youth work sectors for assisting this work and amplifying the voices of LGBTQ+ young people.

About LGBT Youth Scotland

LGBT Youth Scotland is Scotland's national charity for LGBTQ+ young people. Our vision is a Scotland where LGBTQ+ young people can flourish and thrive.

For over 20 years, we've been creating safer spaces aimed at helping LGBTQ+ young people overcome systemic barriers, so they can reach their full potential in life, work and education.

We support young people in all aspects of their lives through the provision of amazing youth work, and we support them to use their voices to create change in equality and human rights.

For more information about our work, visit <https://lgbtyouth.org.uk/>