

WORKING FOR A GAY ORGANISATION



Recruitment columnist Katherine Cowan is an independent diversity consultant. For more information go to: www.katherinecowan.net



Most of us know what it's like to be the only gay girl in the office and we all know there are pros and cons. Katherine Cowan asks: So what's it like to work somewhere all-gay?

There are probably more LGBT-run organisations to work for than you'd think. We've got gay charities, venues and publishers, not to mention all the gay businesses springing up to cater for our civil partnerships and holiday requirements. The Gay Business Association alone has over 130 members, from accountants and lawyers to artists and photographers.

Maria Sookias is the Advice Services Team Supervisor at Stonewall Housing, providing advice to LGBT people having housing problems. "I didn't want to work for just any LGBT organisation," she says, "I wanted to work with people who supported and empowered lesbian, gay, bi and

trans people at the rough end of discrimination. I have great job satisfaction, especially when clients are moved into safety."

Annie Emery, Production Manager at the Lesbian & Gay Foundation (LGF) also wanted to work where she could make a positive contribution to her community. "I struggled for years to accept my sexuality," she explains, "as a teenager, I genuinely believed that being a lesbian simply wasn't an option. My main reason for choosing to work here is to ensure that there is information and support out there for the whole community – those coming out, whatever age they are. If just one young dyke picks up a resource the LGF have produced and understands that it's OK to be gay – well that's good enough for me."

Feeling part of a majority, rather than a minority, can also be very refreshing. "It feels like an oasis in a predominantly heterosexual desert," says Maria. While many employers have taken huge strides forward in terms of promoting LGBT equality and creating inclusive workplaces,

some of us do still encounter prejudice at work – whether that's dodgy banter, or outright homophobic bullying. Being in a predominantly gay environment can mean feeling comfortable reading g3 in the staffroom at lunchtime and talking openly about your girlfriend without the fear of negative reactions.

Advertising Sales Manager Maz Ogden works at Square Peg Media, the gay-owned publishing firm which produces g3 magazine. She came from a very macho corporate environment. "I was the token lesbian. The guys were always intrigued and every single one at some point asked me the standard questions, when did I realise I was gay, do I ever miss men and so on. I never experienced homophobia, but sometimes I wondered what the response would have been if I was a butch lesbian." In some ways, she feels being gay worked to her advantage: "I didn't have guys I was managing cracking on to me!"

And the advantage of working somewhere gay? "I get to interview *The L Word* actresses!"

useful info

Consortium of LGBT Community & Voluntary Organisations: / www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk

Gay Business Association: / www.gba.co.uk

Lesbian & Gay Foundation: / www.lgf.org.uk

Square Peg Media: / www.squarepegmedia.com

Stonewall Housing: / www.stonewallhousing.org