

## Key Messages

The recruitment, assessment, support and supervision of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender foster carers.

These key messages are based on an international literature review published jointly in February 2015 by the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education at the University of Oxford and the University of Bedfordshire. We looked to see what research has taken place on this topic, what that existing research can tell us and in what areas more research may be needed.

### What is the issue?

Fostering agencies need to know the best ways to recruit, assess, support and supervise LGBT carers. This review brings together the existing evidence on these topics and uses it to make recommendations for policy, practice and further research.

### Call for Action

Fostering agencies should:

- Ensure assessments of prospective foster carers do not assume all applications are heterosexual. Do not ignore nor over focus on sexuality and gender.
- Make sure matching decisions are free from assumptions about gender and sexuality; base decisions on the abilities and attributes of the carers and the needs of the child. They should be about whether a foster carer can meet the needs of specific children.
- Ensure that processes used by fostering panels enable thorough consideration of a person's or couple's suitability to foster, irrespective of their gender or sexuality.
- Provide LGBT-specific carer support groups as well as making other support groups inclusive.
- Ensure that the content, processes and structure of foster carer training programmes enable LGBT carers to feel respected, valued and included.



The recruitment, assessment, support and supervision of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender foster carers. An international literature review by Helen Cosis Brown, Judy Sebba and Nikki Luke.

The full report can be read and downloaded for free:  
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/>

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## **What did we do?**

A search of the international research on this topic provided 19 relevant studies (20 published papers) from the UK, USA and Australia for this review. Almost no research was found on bisexual or transgender carers. This suggests that while the focus in the review is on LGBT, in reality it is limited to LG. Most of the studies focused exclusively on the perceptions of established foster carers, less often on perceptions of social workers and only one included young people's perceptions.

*We asked the following questions:*

What is known about the effective recruitment, assessment, support and supervision of LGBT foster carers?

What can fostering services do to improve the quality of the recruitment, assessment, support and supervision of LGBT foster carers?

## **What did we find out?**

- LGBT foster carers express concern about how agencies, social workers and foster children, and in particular birth families *might* respond to their gender and sexuality as well as how they *do* respond. This hampers their recruitment as foster carers or adopters.
- LGBT foster carers think that they would be more easily accepted in independent agencies but no differences emerge in practice.
- LGBT foster carers are more likely than other applicants to want to parent for the first time.
- Issues were raised about whether social workers' attitudes influenced their assessment of LGBT foster carers.
- Appropriate preparation of the child or young person is needed prior to any placement but specific issues should be raised where the placement is with LGBT foster carers.