

17 The LGBTQ+ Interactive International Travel for Work Policy Development Tool – An Introduction

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Research Domains

Higher Education policy (HEP)

Abstract

This presentation will provide an introduction to the newly launched 'LGBTQ+ Interactive International Travel for Work Policy Development Tool' (as of 2023).

Our previous research (Hamilton and Giles, 2021) revealed that many Higher Education Institutions ('HEIs') were lacking policy where LGBTQ+ students and staff were concerned when travelling internationally. This raises concerns for LGBTQ+ persons given the wide diversity of law and culture when considering LGBTQ+ issues on a global scale. The primary aims of the tool and website are to provide policy guidance for HEIs, businesses and individuals when considering developing or accessing policy in the area of LGBTQ+ international academic mobility.

Having recently been through developmental stages, this will be the first introduction of the novel LGBTQ+ Policy Development Tool to an academic audience. This introductory talk regarding the tool shall detail user case insights, preliminary findings of the data collected from the tool and user experience feedback.

Full paper

The LGBTQ+ Interactive International Travel for Work Policy Development Tool has been created for Higher Education Institutes ('HEIs'), businesses and individuals to identify gaps and oversights in current organisational policies and practices regarding safeguarding of LGBTQ+ individuals embarking on international travel for the purposes of work or education. This free-to-access tool will guide user organisations (particularly HEIs and companies) as well as individuals to create policy. By means of individual reports, based on responses to the tool, this will allow organisations insight into the concerns of their LGBTQ+ staff, students and colleagues, and a means of addressing these concerns when considering international travel policies and practices.

The recommendations provided to users will be delivered in the form of a 'personalised output report', which will provide suggestions for improving their organisation's safeguarding policies and practices based on their answers to the questions featured in the tool. The interactive tool is comprised of 51 questions regarding policies and practices currently in place at the user's organisation, as well as questions regarding measures to safeguard LGBTQ+ stakeholders at differing stages of planning and implementation of international travel plans, including before, during and after international travel.

Each downloadable output will be comprised of a checklist which details what measures the HEI / company currently has in place, as well as recommendations for future policy drafting and generation for the organisation, with general information on how to address the items on their personalised output report. The guidance featured in user output reports is not exhaustive, but serves as starting points for further research and raising awareness of specific LGBTQ+ concerns in policy.

As well as providing a novel service to users, the interactive tool and respective personalised user output reports are evidence based and informed through consultation with contemporary research and LGBTQ+ informed stakeholder organisations. The origins of the tool stem from critique of the UK Government's International Education Strategy (2021), and the fact that this does not currently consider the specific concerns of LGBTQ+ persons travelling internationally for the purposes of work or education.

This is a concern as laws regarding LGBTQ+ persons are very diverse internationally. Approximately 71 jurisdictions worldwide still criminalise same-sex (or even suspected same-sex) expression and activity, resulting in palpable danger for LGBTQ+ international travellers (The Human Dignity Trust, 2022). These dangers not only include discrimination and hate crimes, but also the risk of state sanctioned penalties such as hard labour, corporal punishment, indefinite imprisonment, and in some cases even death sentences (The Human Dignity Trust, 2022).

Hamilton (Primary Investigator of this project) and Giles research previously explored the lack of UK HEI policy in this area (Hamilton and Giles, 2021). In their investigation of international academic mobility, Hamilton and Giles sent Freedom of Information requests to UK Universities to gauge the existence of policies in place for LGBTQ+ staff and students embarking on international travel. They found that although many UK HEIs pursued globalisation initiatives, the advice given to LGBTQ+ students and staff travelling to international jurisdictions remained 'heteronormative' in nature, ignoring specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ international travellers, and underestimating the impact of the 'disparate global landscape of LGBTQ+ rights' (Hamilton and Giles, 2021: 1).

This research was furthered by the creators of the LGBTQ+ Interactive Tool (Hamilton and Virdee). In 2022, the University of Reading allocated Hamilton and Virdee Research England funded rapid-response policy engagement funding to explore the lived experiences of fifteen individual LGBTQ+ Academics at UK HEIs. This pilot project was concerned with interviewee observations of the balance between the globalisation initiatives of UK Universities and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ stakeholder concerns in policies and processes regarding safeguarding of international travel by their organisations. The findings of this study revealed that many of those interviewed considered that LGBTQ+ specific concerns were often excluded from the development of HEI policies regarding international travel. Additionally, findings demonstrate that LGBTQ+ stakeholders at these HEIs were fearful that their career progression would be impeded by their refusal to engage with globalisation initiatives, juxtaposed against concerns for their own safety and well-being in jurisdictions that are both legally and socially hostile towards LGBTQ+ individuals.

In response to these conditions, Hamilton and Virdee have developed an Interactive tool to assist both UK HEIs and businesses to develop policy that is inclusive and mindful of the specific risks and concerns potentially faced by LGBTQ+ individuals travelling internationally for work or education purposes.

References

Hamilton and Giles (2021) 'International Academic Mobility, Agency and LGBTQ+ Rights: A Review of Policy Responses to Internationally Mobile LGBTQ+ staff/students at UK HE Institutions with Recommendations for a Global Audience', Policy Reviews in Higher Education, pp 1-22. DOI: 10.1080/23322969.2021.1969990.

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