



LGBT+ Labour Questions - Richard Burgon Response

1. What have you done in your time as a Member of Parliament and prior to your election to improve the lives of LGBT+ people?

Prior to being elected as a Member of Parliament, I was an employment lawyer for a decade specialising in discrimination cases. I would fight to ensure that workers who had faced homophobia, sexism and other forms of discrimination in their workplace received the justice they deserve and that their rights were defended.

During my time as a lawyer I saw, day-after-day, how legislative change is not enough. Far too often people are unable to enforce their hard-won rights or are not even aware of them. That underlines how, as well as affecting legislative change, our Party has a key role to play in removing the practical barriers that people face to living in a truly equal society.

I am proud of having served in Labour's Shadow Cabinet that pushed forward strong commitments on LGBT+ rights in both our 2017 and 2019 manifestos. One of my greatest regrets of not winning the election was that I am not able to act on my plans to roll out a whole series of reforms in the criminal justice system. One such reform was to be the creation and strengthening of a new generation of law centres to empower people to enforce their legal rights which would have included sector-specific legal support - for LGBT+ people, Disabled people, migrants etc.

As an MP I voted in favour of allowing same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland. Regarding my own role as a local MP, away from the legislative element, I truly value the opportunity to support local constituents facing homophobia, transphobia and discrimination and the ability I have as an MP to intervene to meet with and help people at what can be the most difficult time in their life.

2. As Labour Deputy Leader, what is the first change in legislation you would campaign on to improve the lives of LGBT+ people?

From a legislative point of view, I would work to reform the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to introduce self-declaration for transgender people in line with our 2019 manifesto commitments.

Of course with the current hard-right Conservative government, this will be difficult to achieve and so, from a campaigning point of view, it may be necessary to focus on ensuring hard-won rights are not rolled backwards. For example, I fear that the Tories will use the cover of Brexit to water down the Human Rights Act and that this could have a specific impact on equalities protections. We must fight this tooth and nail.

3. How will you root out incidences of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia alongside all other forms of discrimination in the Labour party?

In a world where reactionary right-wing populists are making huge gains - the latest being the horrifically homophobic President in Brazil - we must put the fight for equality at the forefront of our campaigning for a better society.

Our Party has led on the gains that LGBT+ people have made and we can be extremely proud of our record. Nonetheless, our party needs to be an example in the struggles against all forms of discrimination and that means constantly fighting to root out prejudice, not only in society but in our party.

I believe that education has a key role to play in rooting out homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in our party - especially regarding unconscious bias. While this needs to be a 365-day a year effort, LGBT History Month should be a real focus for our a party. I would work with LGBT+ Labour to ensure that more emphasis goes into this and that the month is celebrated across the party. I would ensure that there are events in every region and that all CLPs receive guidance and centrally provided materials to host events and celebrations at this time.

Of course, we need tough sanctions against those who whip up hate and I believe that we need to constantly strive to improve our disciplinary processes to ensure swift and transparent outcomes.

4. How would you ensure that an increased number of diverse LGBT+ people are selected to represent the Labour Party at all levels of local devolved and national elected office?

While it is welcome that there is a growing number of LGBT+ MPs in parliament - 45 following the last general election - there is a long way to go. Our Party must be at the forefront of addressing this by building on the 7% of Labour MPs who identify as LGBT+.

As Deputy Leader, I want to reopen the Democracy Review which I think was inadequate in many ways. In that spirit, my commitment would be to work with LGBT+ Labour to implement the changes you wish to see in the party to have a more powerful voice. For example, following the creating a new policymaking Annual Women's Conference, this could be an option available to all our equalities sectors should they wish.

We need to ensure that the diversity of the LGBT community is also reflected in Labour's elected representatives through specific strategies to encourage more LGBT people who are women, disabled or from an ethnic minority. All the training and support required from the party to overcome current barriers must be provided. At the very least the party should publish targets and improve the collection and publication of data to this end.