

Sexuality

1957: The Wolfenden Report

The Wolfenden Report reported the findings of a committee established in 1954 to consider both homosexuality and prostitution in Britain. It finally recommended that 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be considered a criminal offence'. The report attempted to tow the line between public and private lives, focusing on public activities rather than attempting to pass judgment on how people conducted their affairs privately. On prostitution, the report's recommendations led to harsher penalties for street loitering and soliciting.

1960: The Trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

In 1959 the Obscene Publications Act introduced new censorship laws on publishing in Britain. The first real test to this legislation came in 1960 when the publisher Penguin was prosecuted for its publication of the D. H. Lawrence novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The novel had been previously deemed too sexually explicit in England and had been banned. During the trial the Prosecutor famously asked: "Would you approve of your young sons, young daughters—because girls can read as well as boys—reading this book? Is it a book you would have lying around your own house? Is it a book that you would even wish your wife or your servants to read?" Contrary to these out-of-date attitudes of the British Establishment, Penguin won the trial, and the novel subsequently sold 3 million copies.

1967: The Abortion Act

The Abortion Act legalized abortion in the UK, when carried out by registered medical practitioners. It is considered one of the pieces of 'permissive' legislation passed under the watch of Home Secretary Roy Jenkins during Harold Wilson's 1964-1970 Labour government

1960: Indecency with Children Act

The *Indecency with Children Act* (2 June) increased the maximum prison sentences for sexual offences against children.

1961: The oral contraceptive pill

The oral contraceptive pill became available on the NHS to married women in 1961. This technological breakthrough is sometimes regarded as marking the arrival of a 'sexual revolution'. However, the pill did not become more widely available until 1967, and throughout the 1960s traditional methods of birth control remained common on Britain, even amongst married couples.

1967: Decriminalization of male homosexuality

The Sexual Offences Act of 1967, another example of Harold Wilson's Labour party's so-called 'permissive' legislation during the second half of the 1960s, made it legal for two men aged 21 or over to have sex in private in England and Wales.

1970: The Gay Liberation Front

Inspired by the Stonewall riots in the USA in 1969, The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was founded by students Bob Mellors and Aubrey Walter in October 1970 at the London School of Economics. The GLF manifesto was published in 1971, which set out the key demands and principles. In the GLF's conceptualisation, gay liberation in Britain was not about changing the law but about changing society's attitudes and perceptions. The GLF was disbanded in 1973, but their vision of a political and social movement based on sexual identity inspired many other gay and lesbian activist and community groups that were founded during the 1980s and 1990.

1972: First 'Pride' parade

London's first 'Pride' parade was held on July 1st, a date chosen deliberately to mark the three-year anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

1974: The Women's Liberation Movement and the sixth demand

The sixth demand of the Women's Liberation Movement, a key aspect of British second-wave feminism, was passed at the national conference in Edinburgh in 1974. It was for 'the right to a self-defined sexuality. An end to discrimination against lesbians'. The first part of this was later split off and added as a preface to all the demands. The first four demands of the WLM had been laid out at a conference in Oxford in 1970.

1974: Publication of Jan Morris's account of her transition

In 1974 travel writer and broadcaster Jan Morris published *Conundrum*, an account of her ten-year transition from man to woman. It was one of the first high-profile accounts of trans experience to be published in the UK.

1971: Release of *Growing Up: A New Approach to Sex Education*

Sex education in schools has always been a controversial subject. However, the release of Martin Cole's 1971 film 'Growing-Up' sparked outcry. Unlike previous sex education material, which focused on the physiological aspects of the reproductive system, Cole's inclusion of scenes of nudity and discussions of masturbation outraged many. Several LEAs banned the film outright and, ultimately, it was never shown in schools for fear of its corrupting effects

1974: The first lesbian kiss on BBC television

The first lesbian kiss on TV was broadcast in 'Girl', a 35-minute BBC drama set in the army, by James Robson. In the episode, Jackie (Alison Steadman) is leaving the army and encounters Corporal Harvey (Myra Frances), her ex-lover. Much later, in 1994, a kiss between two female characters on the Channel 4 soap *Brookside* was much more widely hailed as the first same-sex kiss on UK television.

1978: Protection of Children Act

The *Protection of Children Act* (20 July) made illegal the making and distribution of indecent photographs of children.

1983: *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* and the row over homosexual propaganda

Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin, a children's picture book discussing male homosexuality by Danish author Susanne Bosche, was published in English. The story describes a few days in the life of a five-year-old girl named Jenny, her father Martin, and his boyfriend Eric who lives with them. Jenny's mother Karen lives nearby and often visits the household. Bosche said that she wrote the book because she became aware of the problems which some children face when meeting unfamiliar family groupings.

Despite these intentions, the book was categorized as 'homosexual propaganda' by the UK tabloid press in the UK. When a copy of *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* was found in a local authority library in 1983, it caused an outcry. The *Daily Mail* lambasted local councils for promoting homosexuality to children at the tax payer's expense.

1987: The AIDS epidemic

First used as a term in 1982, the Aids epidemic of the 1980s was particularly devastating to the UK's male homosexual community. In 1987 the UK government's *Don't Die of Ignorance* campaign was launched, needle exchanges were first piloted in the UK and the first antiretroviral drug, AZT, was approved in the US.

In the same year, pictures of Princess Diana holding the hand of a patient in an Aids ward were broadcast around the world and HIV testing was introduced across the UK. The first world Aids day was launched in 1988.

1994 (February): Age of consent for gay men reduced to 18

The Conservative Member of Parliament Edwina Currie introduced an amendment to lower the age of consent for homosexual acts from 21 to 16, in line with the age for heterosexual acts. The vote was defeated and the gay male age of consent was lowered to 18 instead. The lesbian age of consent was not set.

1987: Department of Education and Science Circular on Sex Education at School

DES Circular 11/87 *Sex education at school* (25 September) explained the new duties and responsibilities of governors, heads, teachers and local authorities in relation to sex education, following the passing of the 1986 Education (No 2) Act. It included guidelines regarding teaching about homosexuality, AIDS, the age of consent, and the role of parents and teachers.

1988 (May): Section 28 of the Local Government Act

Section 28 of the Local Government Act was a law passed by a Conservative government. It was brought in to "prohibit the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities", stopping councils and schools encouraging "the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship". Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said at the time: "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay. All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life." The law prompted mass protests by LGBT+ campaigners.

1994 (May): Department of Education Circular on Sex Education in Schools

DFE Circular 5/94 [Education Act 1993: Sex Education in Schools](#) (6 May): underlined the requirement to provide a 'moral framework' for Sex Education. According to the Secretary of State, the purpose of sex education should be to provide knowledge about loving relationships, the nature of sexuality and the processes of human reproduction. At the same time it should lead to the acquisition of understanding and attitudes which prepare pupils to view their relationships in a responsible and healthy manner. It must not be value-free; it should also be tailored not only to the age but also to the understanding of pupils.

2003: Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations

Until 2003, employers could discriminate against LGBTQ+ people by not hiring them or promoting them based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTQ+ people did not have protection from bullying and sometimes were not offered the same benefits as other colleagues, or were unfairly affected by rules at work. This legislation made it illegal to discriminate against lesbians, gay and bisexual people in the workplace.

2002: Equal rights for adoption to same-sex couples

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 allowed gay and lesbian single people, as well as same-sex couples, to adopt a child in the UK. Before this, neither same-sex couples nor unmarried heterosexual couples could adopt or foster children.

2000: Scottish Government abolishes Section 28 of the Local Government Act

Scottish parliament voted 99 to 17 with two abstentions to abolish Clause 28. Although legislation was introduced to do the same in England and Wales, the Bill was defeated.

2001: Age of consent for gay/bi men lowered to 16

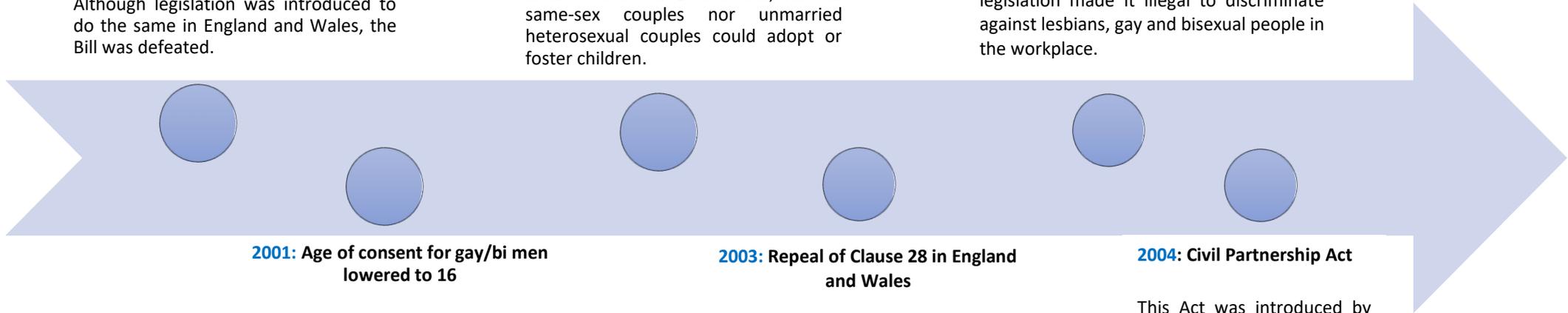
After three defeats in the House of Lords, the Labour Government forced through legislation lowering the age of consent for gay men to 16. The Scottish parliament voted to adopt this legislation north of the border.

2003: Repeal of Clause 28 in England and Wales

Section 28 is repealed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, lifting the ban on local authorities from 'the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality'.

2004: Civil Partnership Act

This Act was introduced by the Labour Government and gave same-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. It officially came into effect on 5 December 2005.



2004: Gender Recognition Act

This Act came into effect on 4 April 2005, giving trans people full legal recognition in their appropriate gender. It allowed trans people to acquire a new birth certificate, although gender options were still limited to 'male' or 'female'.

2009: Stonewall release report on Homophobic bullying in Britain's schools

The results of a survey of teachers and non-teaching staff in primary and secondary schools published by Stonewall. This report interviewed teachers tackling homophobic bullying at school.

2014: Same-Sex Marriage

The 'Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act' comes into effect, allowing same-sex couples the opportunity to get married in England and Wales, and later in the year, Scotland. Same-sex marriage became legal in Northern Ireland in January 2020.

2007: DCSF publishes guidance on Homophobic Bullying

The Department for Children, Schools and Families publishes 'Homophobic Bullying' advice for schools, including how to recognise it, what schools should do about it, and how to prevent it.

2010: Equality Act

The Equality Act 2010 legislated for equal treatment in access to employment as well as private and public services, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. With many provisions relating to schools, it replaced nine previous Acts and almost a hundred sets of regulations which had been issued over several decades. The Act also allowed religious and faith institutions in England, Scotland and Wales permission to refuse a same-sex marriage ceremony if it contravenes their beliefs. With limited exceptions, the Equality Act 2010 does not apply in Northern Ireland.

2015: House of Commons Education Committee Report on PSHE and sex education

This report by the Commons Education Select Committee said sex education should be compulsory in all primary and secondary schools.

