

**G-Force
2 Year Progress Report**



Supporting Professional Policing

**A Report on the Progress of G-Force, the
Garda LGBT Employee Support Network,
January 2011 – January 2013.**

(L – R) Deputy Commissioner Nacie Rice, Chief Superintendent Herman Renes (Netherlands Police and President of the EGPA), Minister for Justice Equality and Defence, Mr Alan Shatter T.D., Sgt Paul Franey (Vice-President EGPA) and Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan at the launch of the 6th European Gay Police Association Conference, Dublin Castle 28th June 2012.

“I am proud to stand here today as Garda Commissioner, with members of the organisation I lead who feel confident to be open about their sexual orientation and identity in our workplace. I am equally conscious however that there are others who do not feel comfortable or able to be as open. If that is for reasons of privacy or otherwise, then it is a personal choice which we can all respect. However, if their reluctance flows from fear or anxiety on their part because of acts, omissions, attitudes, glances, or atmosphere in the workplace – then that is a challenge for us. And it is a challenge which we cannot afford to ignore.”

*Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan
Speaking at the 6th EGPA 2012 Conference in Dublin Castle*

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Introduction

In January 2011, the 'G-Force Strategy 2011-2013' document was agreed by the G-Force Committee. Based on the G-Force objectives, as outlined in the groups Constitution, the strategy document outlined a number of goals for the period January 2011 – January 2013.

The many successes of G-Force during this period are outlined hereunder. The constitutional objectives and goals provided a framework for what we had hoped to achieve. What we planned was challenging, however, we have successfully worked on each of the 16 G-Force aims and objectives as outlined, and achieved fantastic results.

The strategy document outlined the goals of a group which was attempting to change the lived working experience of LGBT Garda employees. This involves going beyond simple practical tasks and projects to influencing cultural change in the organisation and trying to win over hearts and minds. This task has been undertaken almost exclusively by members of Garda and Sergeant rank, in their spare time, assisted by members of the Garda Reserve.

The end goal is simple, a Garda Síochána where there is no need for G-Force to exist. While that goal, at both an organisational and societal level is challenging, in a short number of years, we have come a long way. There are considerable opportunities to build on this progress within the Garda organisation, and on progress made in Ireland more generally to include, accept and respect LGBT people.

For all those who supported us in what was an ambitious project, we thank you.

The Committee of G-Force

G-Force Aims and Objectives – Core Strategic Goals

1. To provide a support structure to assist LGBT members of An Garda Síochána who may require assistance in dealing with issues arising from their sexual orientation.
2. To provide a forum for social interaction and peer support for LGBT members of An Garda Síochána.
3. To provide information on internal and external support service providers.
4. Assist the Garda organisation in its implementation of its Diversity Strategy.
5. To provide assistance to An Garda Síochána in the development of policy relating to LGBT/Diversity issues, if requested.
6. To assist An Garda Síochána in the provision and delivery of Diversity training to employees, if requested.
7. To increase the visibility of LGBT staff in AGS through a variety of communication initiatives.
8. To provide assistance to An Garda Síochána when dealing with its LGBT customers in a variety of policing situations, if requested.
9. To assist Garda LGBT Liaison Officers (external liaison officers) in their role, if requested.
10. To advocate the business value of Diversity.
11. To assist Garda Human Resource Management in its recruitment function, if requested.
12. To provide information and support for members experiencing bullying, harassment and/or sexual harassment in the workplace.
13. Promote equality and understanding within An Garda Síochána.
14. To liaise with other LGBT organisations (including police organisations) to ascertain best practice, nationally and internationally on a range of LGBT issues.
15. Liaise with Staff Associations on areas of concern.
16. Secure adequate funding.

** At the 2012 G-Force AGM the G-Force constitution was amended to change LGB to LGBT (Transgender).

G-Force Committee members meet President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina Higgins at Áras an Uachtaráin.

“This is the first time that this conference has been held in Ireland and can be viewed as indicative of this country’s journey from past days of exclusion, of shunning, of suspicion, of intolerance, of ridicule, to new days, more appropriate days, of inclusion for citizens of differing sexual orientation.”

President Michael D. Higgins.
6th European Gay Police Association Conference Reception

1 Providing Support

1.1 Supporting LGBT Gardaí

Supporting LGBT Lives

“I have great respect for those of you who provide support to individuals who regard their circumstances as stressful, or who may feel uncomfortable in being open about their sexuality in the workplace, or who are simply in need of some moral support.”

Mr. Alan Shatter T.D., Minister for Justice and Equality while opening the EGPA Conference in Dublin Castle in June 2012.

The active membership of G-Force has grown substantially in the two year period. Members interact with G-Force in a variety of ways. Some are only comfortable communicating by email or telephone, others are actively involved in the many social activities and committee meetings held.

In a short number of years, through the support of G-Force, the lives of a large number of LGB Garda members have changed considerably. Many Gardaí have moved from being in a position of absolute fear of disclosure of their sexual orientation, to being comfortable, both within themselves and with their sexual orientation in their work environment. Life changing for the people concerned, and something that many members would never have thought possible. This is the most fundamental change G-Force can hope to achieve.

Social Interaction

The two years have seen a significant increase in G-Force social interaction. The G-Force social secretary has worked hard to ensure that regular events were held which would attract large numbers of G-Force members and members of external employee resource groups where possible. There has been great attendance at events by members of the PSNI Gay Police Association and many UK police forces.

G-Force has also networked socially and professionally with a variety of LGBT employee support groups including, IBM, Microsoft, Ernst and Young, Citi Bank, Ulster Bank, INTO Teachers Network, Gay Doctors Ireland, LGBT Lawyers and members from the Irish Prison Service. We have also held events with Gay Switchboard Dublin and the Emerald Warriors Rugby Club.

LGBT employee support is achieved through providing opportunities for Garda employees to interact with other people like themselves. This reduces the feelings of isolation reported by so many members before the group was established.

Information Provision/Web and Social Media

A new G-Force website has been developed and information on a variety of support providers is being updated and will be placed on our website in the coming months.

The Garda Portal has published a number of news items for G-Force in the previous two years and this has been an important means of communicating with the Garda organisation. G-Force continues to communicate to a wider audience through social media. G-Force has a public profile on both Facebook and on Twitter.

Visibility

A study of the experiences of LGB Gardaí prior to the establishment of G-Force reported members speaking of the absolute invisibility of LGB employees in An Garda Síochána. Bringing about effective social change for an invisible minority is challenging, hence creating positive LGBT visibility has been vital to our success.

G-Force has significantly increased the visibility of LGBT Gardaí in the strategy period.

Considerable exposure of LGB Gardaí as employees was achieved through the Dublin City University study into the lives of LGB Gardaí. A project initiated through G-Force efforts. The study was advertised in the Garda Review, Gay Community News and on the Garda Portal.

The pinnacle of G-Force's success during this period, however, was the hosting of the 6th European Gay Police Association Conference, which brought LGBT issues to the forefront of police diversity management in Ireland. The conference achieved considerable publicity in the national print media, on radio and brought LGBT issues to the front page of the Garda Review. The Garda Website and the Garda Portal also advertised the conference. The conference's success significantly increased the visibility of LGBT Gardaí.

G-Force will continue to increase the visibility of LGBT staff through positive media and web based initiatives.

Bullying

“It should never be acceptable for any member of An Garda Síochána to treat any colleague differently because of their sexual orientation, nor should an individual’s sexual orientation impact on or be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as impacting on their promotional prospects.”

Alan Shatter T.D., Minister for Justice and Equality.

Recent research into the experiences of LGBT Gardaí did not highlight homophobic bullying is a significant problem within An Garda Síochána. Where it does occur, however, it has a very distressing effect on the members concerned. There are LGBT members who report bullying related issues to G-Force on an ongoing basis. G-Force will continue to support LGBT members where they experience homophobic bullying.

Challenging the use of homophobic language in the workplace will be a key future goal for G-Force.

1.2 Supporting the Garda Organisation

Adding Business Value

“It is important therefore that we recognise that there is a link between our internal culture and treatment of each other in the work place and the quality and nature of the service we provide to the community. Our internal values can transfer to and impact on the way we interact externally.”

*Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan
Speaking at the 6th EGPA Conference, Dublin Castle 2012*

The advocacy of LGBT employee rights as having business value has been a key thread running through G-Force’s development since it’s early days. G-Force was instrumental in An Garda Síochána winning the *Employer of the Year Diversity Award* at the GALA awards. Our considerable input into the Garda Diversity Strategy saw it’s LGB Section included in the GLEN Workplace Diversity Guide.

Promoting Equality and Understanding

Events such as the 6th EGPA Conference in June 2012 and the DCU research project have significantly impacted on the promotion of equality and understanding in An Garda Síochána. The events provided an opportunity for Garda members, Staff Associations, Garda managers and Department of Justice officials to discuss and debate issues that had never previously been addressed in the Garda and Justice areas. From these discussions a more respectful and understanding organisation has emerged. 2012 was indeed the year where LGBT policing issues became part of organisational and Departmental discourse.

Developing a truly respectful understanding of LGBT issues in any police service is about changing hearts and minds. This requires new thinking and new approaches across a range of sections of the organisation, from personnel management, employee assistance, workplace culture change, updating policies on bullying and harassment and new approaches to the diverse communities we serve. We have moved significantly in An Garda Síochána since the early beginnings of G-Force. We will continue to engage in a positive and professional way with all stakeholders to promote equality and understanding, both in An Garda Síochána and with outside organisations.

Supporting the Garda Diversity Strategy

G-Force has had a representative on the Garda Síochána Diversity Strategy Implementation Board for the period 2010-2012. This has ensured that issues relevant to LGBT members' have been represented at the highest levels in An Garda Síochána.

G-Force members, through work at national and at European level, have gained considerable knowledge and experience of LGBT police diversity matters. G-Force will be available to assist Garda management in relation to any diversity projects.

It is heartening that Commissioner Callinan, in his speech at the opening of the 6th European Gay Police Association conference indicated his strong desire to progress the Garda Síochána Diversity Strategy stating *"I am determined to drive this important agenda forward."*

Selling An Garda Síochána as an Employer of Choice

"If we don't have a diverse workforce, if we don't embrace and respect the diversity of our own staff and if we don't engage effectively with all communities then we cannot police effectively."

Garda Commissioner, Martin Callinan
Speaking at the 6th EGPA Conference, Dublin Castle 2012

G-Force members staffed a Garda recruitment stand at the Dublin LGBT pride festival at Wood Quay in 2010 and 2011. G-Force continues to be one of the most successful and positively publicised LGBT employee support networks in Ireland, selling An Garda Síochána as an *Employer of Choice*.

Selling the Garda organisation as having a positive work environment is a key goal of G-Force. Through the positive media exposure of the work that G-Force has undertaken in 2011 and 2012 An Garda Síochána is now an organisation LGBT people can feel comfortable considering as a career choice. Given the current embargo on recruitment G-Force has continued to support the recruitment of Garda Reserves. There are now a significant number of Reserve members in the group, playing key roles in making it successful.

Homophobic Crime

Research conducted externally shows that LGBT people can experience a high level of violence and harassment, on the basis of their LGBT identity. The Gardai have a critically important role to play in addressing these issues. The Gardai have engaged with LGBT organisations over the last number of years and have appointed LGBT liaison officers. G-Force has made representations to Garda Community Relations. We have offered our support and experience in relation to external LGBT policing issues.

Members of the LGBT community contact G-Force on a regular basis in relation to homophobic incidents. We endeavour to put these people in contact with suitable Gardaí in the Districts concerned, who will deal with the matters raised in a professional and respectful manner.

1.3 Supporting Other LGBT Employees

G-Force continues to assist LGBT employees outside of the Garda area. We do this through professional networking, European engagement and proactive approaches to a wide range of employment sectors.

We will continue to work with industries with challenging working environments for LGBT people to encourage them to support their staff. G-Force will act as role models where possible to highlight to industries that the provision of LGBT support is both good for business and important for the staff they employ.

European Gay Police Association

In 2006 two gay Gardaí attended the European Gay Police Association Conference in Stockholm. For the first time we were introduced to countries where police officers had support structures in place for LGB staff, which were not only progressive and openly operating, but were supported by police managers. It's fair to say that the experience impacted on the Gardaí who returned home from the conference to a service where there was no support for LGB staff and where gay police officers remained almost invisible.

Six years later and a lot has changed. Lessons were learned from networking at a European level and much support was received from the EGPA. Best practice was identified and G-Force attempted to model themselves on best practice forces support structures.

Ireland and G-Force now play a key role in the EGPA. We will continue to network at a European level to learn from and share best practices and to support developing countries.

Irish Prison Service

A significant development in advocating the business value of Diversity was the approach made by G-Force to a number of Irish uniformed public sector services during 2012.

Early contact was made with the Irish Prison Service (IPS) management team prior to the 6th EGPA Conference. We invited them to attend as we were aware that prison officers were facing similar challenges to Garda members.

The IPS Director of Human Resources immediately came on board and chaired the opening plenary session which focused on LGBT related Human Resources issues and the business case for supporting Diversity.

Since the conference, having been convinced of the strong business case for the development of an inclusive workplace, the Director General of the Irish Prison Service has shown great leadership in relation to LGBT inclusivity. The IPS is now proactively working on developing LGBT employee policies and strategies. The Director General is convinced that the development of an LGBT employee support structure will have a positive impact on employees in the IPS. G-Force were delighted to assist in this process having been approached by the IPS Director General.

2 Building Relationships

G-Force has extensively networked, both nationally and internationally, during the two year strategy period.

2.1 Internal Stakeholders

In the two years 2010 – 2012 G-Force has built relationships with many of the key stakeholders who support staff in the Garda organisation.

Staff Associations

G-Force would never have been able to achieve as much as it has without the very considerable support it has received from the four Garda Staff Associations.

In particular G-Force would like to thank Mr. PJ Stone of the Garda Representative Association and recently retired, Mr Joe Dirwan, of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors. Their support has made all of our work possible. We would like to thank the many Garda managers who supported us and their LGBT staff during the past year. Your contribution has made a significant difference to the lives of your staff.

G-Force will continue to work with the Garda Staff Associations on matters where LGBT members need representation at local and/or national level.

Peer Support

There are a number of G-Force members who are trained peer supporters. The Employee Assistance Service has worked to facilitate the training of a number of our members during this period.

Employee Assistance

We have built great working relationships with individual Employee Assistance Officers around the country whom we liaise with on an ongoing basis.

Garda Research Unit

G-Force contacted the Garda Research Unit to request that future audits of Garda culture and the work environment take account of LGBT/ homophobic discrimination. The Garda Research Unit has been extremely positive in it's response and is now very much focused on including all aspects of cultural behaviours in future research.

2.2 External Stakeholders

LGBT Community

G-Force interacts with LGBT community organisations across Ireland on an ongoing basis. Outhouse, Gay Switchboard Dublin, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland) and Belong To are just some of these groups. This community bond was vital in ensuring the success of the 6th EGPA conference and G-Force have sold An Garda Síochána as a progressive and modern organisation to our external stakeholders.

Equality Authority

G-Force has built a very constructive relationship with the Equality Authority. The Equality Authority has been very supportive of our work since G-Force was launched.

Professional Networks

As motioned above, G-Force interacts extensively with public and private sector professional networks.

European Networks

On the European stage G-Force continues to lead the way. Hosting the 6th EGPA conference in Dublin, we brought European LGBT policing best practice to Ireland.

G-Force will continue to liaise with LGBT Employee networks, national LGBT organisations and international actors to research the most progressive LGBT police policies and programmes and to support LGBT people in Ireland and abroad.

3 Key G-Force Successes

3.1 6th European Gay Police Association Conference

The 6th European Gay Police Association Conference in June 2012 was the pinnacle of G-Force's achievements. We influencing thinking on LGBT policing issues in a variety of government departments, employment sectors and the wider public arena.

4 days of events saw up to 400 delegates from across Ireland, Europe and the USA engage in a professional discourse on issues relating to LGBT police employees and LGBT victims of crime.

The foreign delegates were welcomed to Ireland at a reception at Áras an Uachtaráin hosted by President of Ireland, Mr Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina.

The conference proper was opened on Thursday 28th June 2012 by the Minister for Justice and Equality, Mr. Alan Shatter TD. He was joined by the Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan who welcomed the delegates. Two days of conference followed, with 10 plenary speakers and 15 workshops. Topics never previously explored by the EGPA were debated and for the first time a considerable amount of conference time was dedicated to Transgender issues.

On Saturday the 30th June the event concluded with the participation of European LGBT police officers, many in uniform in the Dublin LGBT pride festival.

Uniformed Police Officers from across Europe pass the Parnell Monument at the top of O'Connell Street during the Dublin LGBT Pride festival.

The conference was a huge task for a small group of volunteers to undertake. It was very challenging, however, it was ultimately a great success. It gave a voice and visibility to a group of people who had previously been hidden, isolated and marginalised.

The messages from the President of Ireland, the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Garda Commissioner were very clear. LGBT people, in every employment sphere in Ireland and beyond, deserved the right to equal employment in a discrimination and harassment free environment.

Funding was secured for the running of the European Gay Police Association from a variety of generous sponsors. We would like to take the opportunity to thank the following; The Department of Justice, Equality and Defence, The Equality Authority, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, Bord Failte, the Community Foundation for Ireland, Atlantic Philanthropies, the Garda Representative Association, the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, the Association of Garda Superintendents, the Chief Superintendents Association and An Garda Síochána.

3.2 Dublin City University Research: Sexual Orientation in the workplace.

To build the evidenced base for LGB police staff support in Ireland, G-Force approached academics in Dublin City University with a view to filling the void of academic work on the area.

Two experienced academics from Dublin City University, Dr. Mel Duffy and Dr. Vera Sheridan agreed to take on the project. The project studied areas where being gay, lesbian or bisexual has had a specific impact on working as an employee in An Garda Síochána.

A large number of Gardaí participated in the project. The report, rich with detail and relevant findings, was presented on the opening morning to the 6th EGPA Conference in Dublin Castle in June 2012.

It provides a concrete evidence base for the need to support the work of G-Force and support for LGB Garda staff in general.

3.3 EU Daphne Programme/UCD School of Social Justice LGBT Police Training Programme

G-Force, in conjunction with the European Gay Police Association, have worked with the UCD School of Social Justice to develop a scenario based training package on LGBT issues for police officers. The project was funded by the EU Daphne programme. This training package is at consultation stage.

We are engaging with a number of community stakeholders. The scenario based focus of the training package has already been utilised in Italy for training police officers on LGBT matters. The scenario based package was presented at a police training conference in Montenegro this December. When completed it will be published on line for use wherever police services feel it would be beneficial.

Completion of the training package and dissemination to relevant police and public policy stakeholders throughout Europe and further afield. We hope to engage with relevant police services to ascertain if the training package would be useful.

4. Conclusion

G-Force has managed to successfully bring about significant positive change to the personal and work lives of many employees, both within An Garda Síochána and outside the organisation.

The group has brought business benefits at an organisational level and has assisted the development of an increasingly positive relationship between the Garda organisation and the diverse communities that we serve.

Since the foundation of An Garda Síochána, and indeed since policing began, there have been police officers with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. For most of An Garda Síochána's history, however, LGBT people have remained hidden, fearful and isolated. Their very human nature has been denied.

G-Force members have worked hard to ensure a positive future for LGBT employees. The successes of the last two years being the culmination of 5 years of background research, capacity building and networking.

G-Force will continue to provide support for individuals, to reduce the isolation and invisibility experienced by LGBT Garda employees and to support professional policing in An Garda Síochána. We look forward to the next two years and constructively building upon our successes to date.

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the G-Force Committee. We do not purport to represent the views of Garda management.



Garda LGBT Employee Network

www.g-force.ie