

# COMING OUT IN FOOTBALL

## RESOURCE PACK



**PAWB**  
**EVERYONE**







# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

As part of the FAW's "Our Wales" Strategy we have developed our PAWB Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2021-2026, which outlines our commitment and objectives in creating a more equal game in Wales. Our core vision in the PAWB equality, diversity and inclusion Strategy is a game that is for EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE in Wales, where everyone can participate and strive to be the best version of themselves.

---

The contents of this guide aim to help players, supporters, coaches, officials, anyone who is involved in our sport, the opportunity to have support when coming out in Football.

It also provides opportunity for those who are not in the LGBTQ+ community the chance to learn about allyship and its importance.

We can all play a key role in working towards a future where being in the LGBTQ+ community within the game is normalised and we can all enjoy Football without fear of discrimination.

It is all our responsibility to continually educate ourselves and be allies to underrepresented groups, to work towards an equal game that reflects all communities across Wales.

We need everyone's support throughout the football family, together, we can all make a difference.

#TogetherStronger

# CONTENTS

<b>WHAT IS “COMING OUT?”</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>WHERE DO I BEGIN?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PLANNING AHEAD</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>BEING AN ALLY</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>TRANS &amp; NON-BINARY</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>WHAT SUPPORT IS OUT THERE?</b>	<b>18</b>





# WHAT IS “COMING OUT?”





## WHAT IS “COMING OUT?”

Coming out refers to the very personal journey that people who are LGBTQ+ go through, as they work to discover and accept their sexual orientation or gender identity and share that identity or sexual orientation openly with other people.

Coming out is not necessarily a one – off event, it can be something an individual has to do repeatedly in different environments, whether that be coming out to work colleagues, teammates, family, friends or even strangers, but it does get easier over time! When we talk about “Coming Out” it’s important to recognise that there is no “right way” to come out to those around you, as it’s a completely unique experience to you.

Some people prefer to tell everybody at once, for example by posting on social media, calling a team meeting in the changing rooms or even providing an interview to a local paper or news channel. Others move more slowly, sharing the news with one person in the team that they’re closer with or the manager/coach.

You may feel comfortable being open about your sexual orientation and gender identity only with certain groups or people, you may decide you don’t want to be ‘out’ in every context. That’s okay too. Coming out is only a part of your journey, and while it may be an important one for many people, it doesn’t define who you are, or the ways in which you love and accept yourself.



**“FOOTBALL FOR ME AT A VERY YOUNG AGE, GAVE ME EVERYTHING THAT I NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND THAT BEING GAY WAS NOT ONLY OKAY, BUT IT WAS PERFECTLY NORMAL”.**

**JESS FISHLOCK**





**WHERE DO  
I BEGIN?**



When deciding to come out to anyone, it can be a very scary process, you may suffer with anxiety about how people will react, will they react in a positive or negative way. It's important to recognise that people's initial reactions to your news, are not necessarily their true reaction. They may need time to process the information; just as you have had to do yourself.

## IT'S YOUR DECISION

Only come out when you're ready too, if you understand and accept your sexuality/ gender identity but are not ready to tell others yet, that's okay. There is no set time frame on how or when you need to come out, as long as it's what you want to do, when you want to do it. Always make sure the environment you're coming out in, is a safe one for you.

## PROCESSING:

Being able to process your teammates, coaches, friends and families' and the wider football family's reactions is something you will have to face. Some of these people in your life will react in a negative way and some in a positive. It's important to recognise that people's initial reactions to your news, are not necessarily their true reaction. They may need time to process the information; just as you have had to do yourself. Those who support you will help take the weight off your shoulders and allow you to be your true authentic self around them, allowing you to relax more and play, coach or support your team to a better standard.

## PREPARE FOR QUESTIONS



"HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN?"

"WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME SOONER?"

"ARE YOU SURE?"

No matter what, people will have questions. If they have a negative or positive reaction, it is usually followed up by questions. If you don't have answers to these questions or don't want to answer them you can politely ask that you move on from the conversation and give yourself time to process.

## YOU SHOULD BE IN CONTROL

Coming out is a very personal journey, sometimes it can feel like a lonely one. Whether your journey takes longer than others, whether you tell one person or hundreds, you should be in control of how you want to open up to others and share your identity. In higher aspects of the game there can be a lot of media attention on you or your team, this can also be the case at lower levels of the game too.





**REMEMBER YOU SHOULD BE THE  
ONE IN CONTROL OF YOUR STORY.  
FOOTBALL IS A GAME FOR  
EVERYONE. NO MATTER WHAT.**



# PLANNING AHEAD





If you know you want to come out to your team it's usually best to plan ahead. This can put you in the best position to speak openly and honestly and not become overwhelmed by the occasion. Here are some ways that planning ahead could help you:

## **KNOW YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM:**

If you are closer with individuals on the team, whether they be coaches, medical staff, players or others within your club setting, identify your support system, they'll be the ones to best support you and help you through your journey.

## **ASK FOR ONE TO ONE'S:**

If you're worried about the reaction you could get coming out, speaking to individuals one at a time could be a good way to ease yourself in to the process. Speak to those who you are most comfortable with first, gauge their reaction and your reaction to telling them and then the next time you tell someone the process will become easier.

## **TELL A COACH OR MANAGER:**

Some people prefer to tell their coach, manager or captain first, as these are the individuals who hold the most authority in the dressing room. If you know that they are supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, coming out to them could help you communicate your news to the rest of the Club.

## **REACH OUT:**

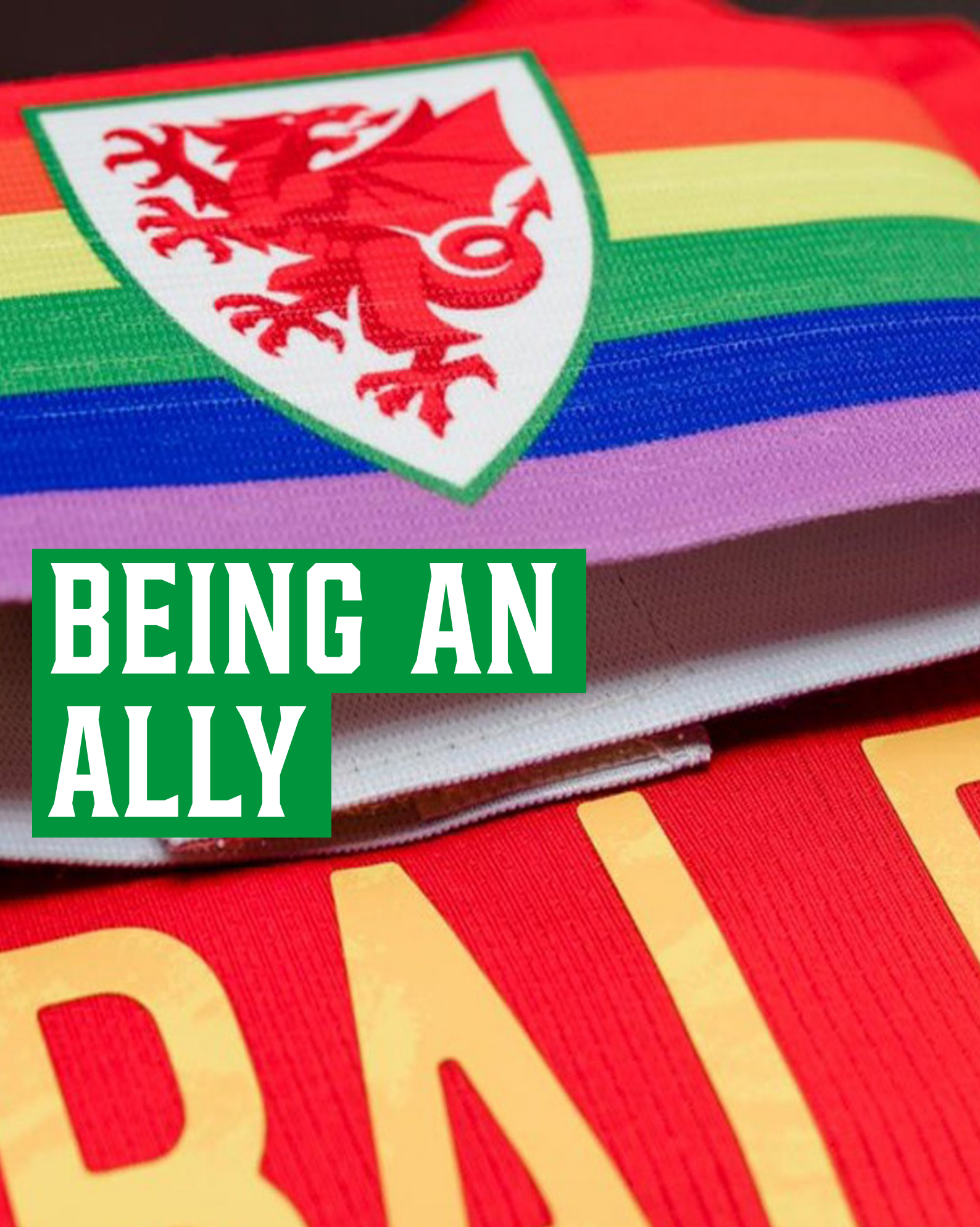
If there is someone else who may have already come out on your team, or on another team, it's sometimes best to speak to them about their experience. Ask them questions, speak to them about your concerns and learn from their journey.

## **CHECK:**

It's always good to check if your Organization/Club acknowledge LGBTQ+ events/awareness periods. Do they take part in league wide/nationwide campaigns throughout the year to better understand if they will be supportive in your journey. Are they pro active allies?

## **KNOW YOUR NEXT MOVE:**

Along with questions being asked through curiosity, your teammates, manager, friends and family will want to know what you want to do next. Do you want to set any boundaries about discussing this further, do you want to keep it to a small group of people for now or do you want to make your coming out more public? If you don't know the answer to that, that is okay; you don't have to plan that far down the line. If you know what you'd like to do next, plan this with your support system, take your time and make sure you do what's best for you.



# BEING AN ALLY





Allyship is something that is often overlooked when we discuss coming out, but it can have a powerful impact on someone's experience and journey. Coming out can be scary for the individual but as a coach, teammate, friend, or family member you may have some questions about how you can be a better ally, we've listed some ways you can always improve as an ally below:

## **BE PROACTIVE:**

Respecting and embracing a person's gender identity/sexuality is the first step to allyship, but this isn't the only step we need to be an effective ally. By being a proactive ally, you will help to support the community through listening, educating yourself and others, raising awareness and standing up for those who may not be able to stand up for themselves. Being proactive is key to helping to build a bridge between communities and to start conversations between those outside of minority communities about our role to help their journey in equality and inclusion.

## **LISTEN:**

Listening can sound like a very simple step, simple but effective. By offering your time to sit with someone, listen to their worries, their questions, their story, it can really take the world off their shoulders for that moment. Everyone needs a support system throughout life, this is no different.

## **EDUCATION:**

Education is key for both the wider football community and those who are looking to become a better ally by continuing the conversation about LGBTQ+ inclusion in football, what challenges people may face in our game on and off the pitch and how we can all do our part to create a more inclusive game moving forward. By having your staff, players, coaches etc take equality, diversity & inclusion training, it can instill an openly inclusive environment at your Club. People may feel happier to have conversations about LGBTQ+ inclusion in football, if they've had opportunity to ask initial questions, learn more and discuss openly about their opinions and understanding of this topic. The culture of the men's professional set-up can make it a particularly challenging environment for anyone who is gay or bi – the pressure on players from academy level to first team, the sense of needing to conform to progress, and the intense interest from fans and the media, are just some of the influences that might cause a footballer to struggle. It is vitally important that through education we change the culture surrounding the male game to become more open to discussing these topics.

## **LANGUAGE:**

Language is a powerful tool which can have a great impact on those around us, it helps us to better communicate with others in the community, especially those in minority communities. When we think of language, we may sometimes shy away from using different types of terminology for minority communities due to fear of "getting it wrong". However, language doesn't have to be a scary thing. Language is something allies, and the community can use to extend a hand between each other. You have to allow yourself to sometimes get terminology and language wrong, to learn from others about the appropriate use of language next time. A simple change in language that can make everyone feel included can be the use of gender-neutral language. Instead of using words like "lads, boys, girls" etc maybe use words like "team, united, city" etc.

## VISIBILITY:

Visibility can be anything from changing your Clubs crest on social media into rainbow colours or taking part in LGBTQ+ events throughout the football calendar, such as Football V Homophobia Month of Action (February) or the Stonewall Rainbow Laces Campaign (November). This visible show of support helps to ease nerves of those in the game from the LGBTQ+ community, without needing to have a conversation about their gender identity or sexuality. It's another way to extend your show of support without having to sit down with the individual and discuss their gender identity or sexuality openly, as they may not be ready to do so.

## AWARENESS:

When discussing the awareness of LGBTQ+ people in sport we can discuss our own self-awareness and the awareness of others. It is vitally important that we create awareness of the struggles and boundaries the LGBTQ+ community can have in Football and how we as a football community can take responsibility in changing this. It's important we hold ourselves and others accountable to a lack of awareness and make sure we all work together to become more aware of what we can do to help progress forward. It is also important we raise awareness of the success of LGBTQ+ sports personalities, their stories and journey. Positive role models such as Jess Fishlock, Natasha Harding etc can instill a confidence in the LGBTQ+ community in sports to believe they can be successful in this field.

## SUMMARY:

Allyship is a vital part of our journey towards a more equal and inclusive game in Wales, we can all support as best as we can, be it on social media, promoting campaigns such as Rainbow Laces, or being visible at events such as Pride. Speak to those in the community, fellow allies and know that you'll be playing an important role toward a better future for the LGBTQ+ community in Welsh Football. You will ALWAYS get the most out of your coaches, players, officials etc when they can be their true authentic selves.

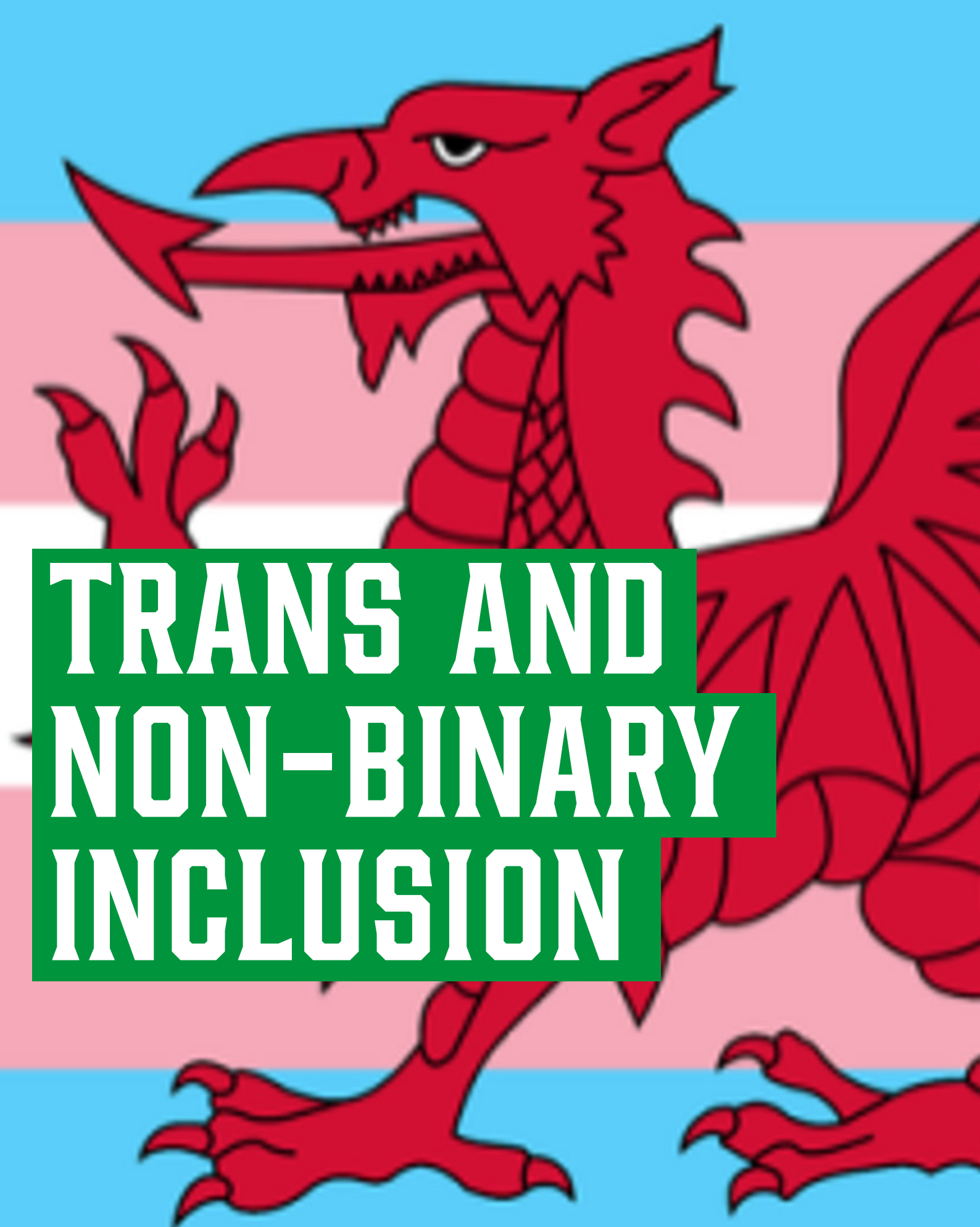


**“THE MORE PEOPLE  
WE CAN INCLUDE  
AND MAKE FEEL  
WELCOME AND  
HAPPY TO WATCH  
FOOTBALL, LISTEN  
TO FOOTBALL, COME  
PLAY FOOTBALL,  
COACH FOOTBALL,  
THEN THE BETTER  
REALLY, ISN'T IT?”**

**CONNOR ROBERTS**







# TRANS AND NON-BINARY INCLUSION



## IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

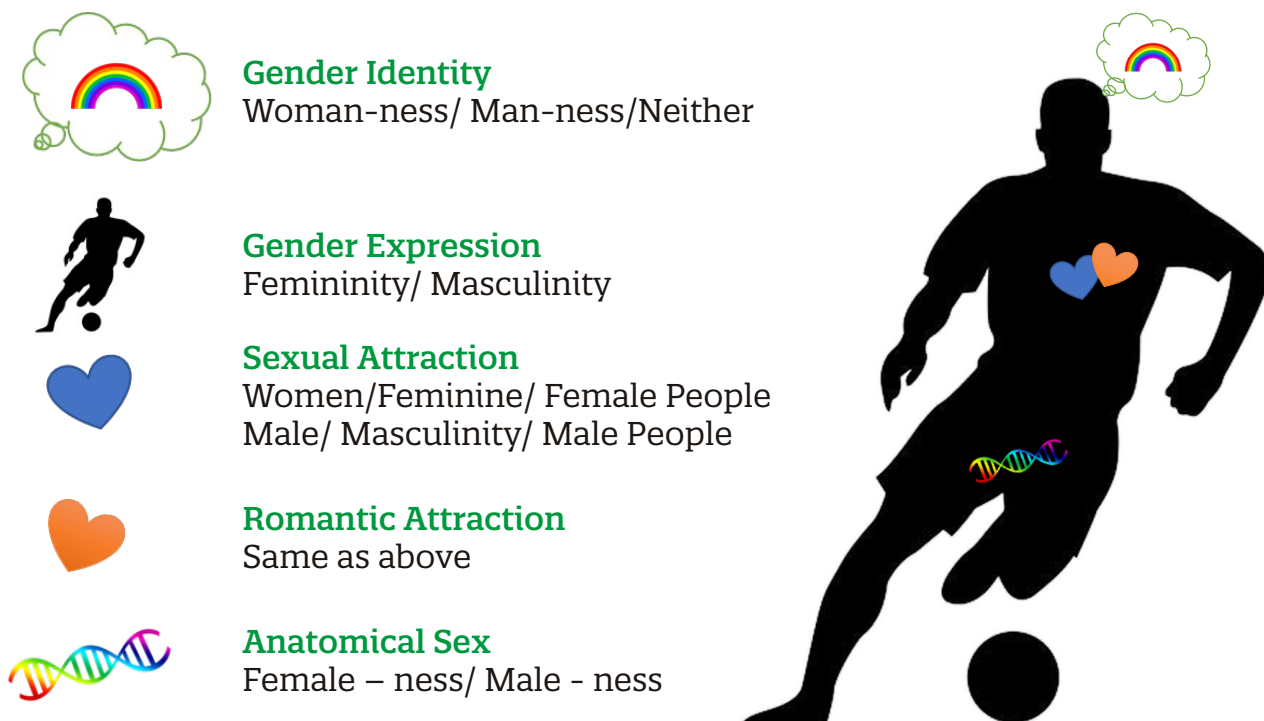
Coming out as Trans or Non-Binary in football can be a very different experience for some. The process of coming out to teammates, other fans, your league or even your national association can be a longer and more complicated process. But as part of the FAW's role, we want to create opportunity for everyone in Wales to play the game, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation. Under the Equality Act 2010, gender reassignment is a protected characteristic and as such transgender and transsexual people are protected against discrimination.

## TRANSITIONING

Transitioning is an individual process, and for many it will be a personal journey which may or may not involve any physical or medical intervention. Some transgender people will seek a surgical and medical pathway, while others will assume a social transition with no or limited medical treatment. Consequently, as the intention is to include all people within the 'trans umbrella', this presents challenges to sport as many people do not conform within the existing categories based on the sex binary.

## THE GENDERBREAD PERSON

The Genderbread Person is a tool used to explain the differences in gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation etc. It is a visual learning exercise that breaks down the barriers for some, to learn about the differences between these elements and what they mean. We've created the gender footballer.



## OPPORTUNITY

Up to the age of 16, you can play mixed football in Wales. Anyone under the age of 16 playing football in Wales who comes out as Trans/Non Binary will be able to continue to play for any mixed football team. Should the individual wish to update their registration as a player, official, coach etc on our database (COMET) we will then also update their profile to match their affirmed gender and name if applicable.

## FAW TRANS POLICY

Consequently, as the intention is to include all people within the Trans umbrella into football here in Wales, this presents challenges to sport, as many people do not conform within the existing categories based on the sex binary. The FAW Trans Policy governs participation in domestic football within Wales and those competitions managed by the Football Association of Wales, this applies to all those participating in these areas who are 16 and over. It does not govern: - Participation in any football not under the jurisdiction of the FAW - Participation in international football - Participation in competitions governed by FIFA, UEFA, or the International Olympic Committee, or anyone under the age of 16 playing football in Wales.

## TRANS & NON-BINARY FANS

LGBTQ+ people already exist in sport, in a variety of roles and although some people may not feel comfortable to be open about this yet, it's important we continue to talk about the issues they may face when coming out in sport. As a Trans or Non-Binary supporter of a Club you may feel lost in the crowd, not thought of. By reaching out to your Club, supporters trust or even LGBTQ+ supporter group you can create a point of contact for you to discuss further how you can feel supported and how your Club can become better allies to the Trans and Non-Binary community. Here in Wales, we have the Rainbow Wall who represent the Welsh National Teams LGBTQ+ supporters.







# WHAT SUPPORT IS OUT THERE?



## THE CONTINUATION OF YOUR JOURNEY

The continuation of your journey after coming out is just as important as the initial coming out. What support can you get to continue through your football journey as an out and proud member of the community? We've compiled a list of people who could continue to support you through your journey here in Wales:

### PAWB.CYMRU

Launched as part of the FAW's PAWB strategy, Pawb.cymru provides resource packs such as this one, as well as containing videos and uploads of previous and future panel discussions, and workshops on LGBTQ+ inclusion for Clubs, terminology and language and much more. As well as this, if you are subject to any form of discrimination in Welsh football, you can also report this on the [Pawb.cymru](https://pawb.cymru) website.

### THE RAINBOW WALL

Created in February 2021, The Rainbow Wall is the official LGBTQ+ supporter group for the Cymru National Men's and Women's Teams. They have created a community and support system for supporters both within and outside the LGBTQ+ community, holding pre match meet ups, having block bookings at Wales games, a Whatsapp group, merchandise, mental health support and a visible presence on social media. To get in contact with a member of The Rainbow Wall Team you can email them here: [rainbowwallcymru@gmail.com](mailto:rainbowwallcymru@gmail.com) <https://twitter.com/TheRainbowWall>

### FOOTBALL V HOMOPHOBIA CYMRU

Football v Homophobia exists to challenge discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression at all levels in football. You can get in contact with FVH here: [Cymru | Football v Homophobia](https://www.facebook.com/Cymru-Football-v-Homophobia)

### CARDIFF DRAGONS FC

The CDFC exists to promote participation in and awareness of football, social cohesion, and healthy lifestyles within the LGBTQ+ community in Cardiff, South Wales and beyond. <https://twitter.com/cardiffdragons>

### SWANSEA GALAXY FC

Formed in 2022 in Swansea, the Galaxy are only the second LGBTQ+ specific club in Wales. Find them here: [Swansea Galaxy FC | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/Swansea-Galaxy-FC)

### STONEWALL

[Stonewall Cymru](https://www.stonewall.org.uk) - are part of a vibrant global movement for change made up of LGBTQ+ people, our allies, families and friends. Since day one, we've fought for freedom, for equity and for potential.

### MERMAIDS UK

[Homepage - Mermaids \(mermaidsuk.org.uk\)](https://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk) – Mermaids UK has been supporting transgender, nonbinary and gender-diverse children, young people and their families since 1995





**The Football Association of Wales**  
**Hensol, Pontyclun, CF72 8JY**  
**Telephone: 029 2043 5830**  
**Fax: 029 2049 6953**  
**Email: [info@faw.co.uk](mailto:info@faw.co.uk)**  
**Website: [www.faw.cymru](http://www.faw.cymru)**