



# Turning the Tide on LGBTQ+ Culture in the Royal Navy since 2000

[www.humanrightsatsea.org](http://www.humanrightsatsea.org)

## Foreword

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Joining Britannia Royal Naval College in September 1990 at 18 years to become a Seaman Officer, later to transfer as a Royal Marines Officer and then become a naval legal adviser, among the raft of briefings was one that still sticks in my mind 32 years on. I paraphrase as accurately as possible -

*“Homosexuality in the Navy is unlawful. If you are gay, leave now. If you think you can hide it, you will be found out, arrested and dishonourably discharged. If you know or suspect someone is gay, it is your duty to report it to your chain of command.”*

Many good people suffered appalling treatment because of the previous restrictive law and policies towards homosexuality within the UK Armed Forces. It ended careers and relationships and caused irreparable mental scarring and worse.

Fast forward to 2022. Attitudes have changed. Sense prevails. Diversity, Equality and Inclusion have become an increasing norm in Service life. Prejudice remains, but professional competency and changing culture are winning out.

The reality was that there were always gay people serving in our Armed Forces for the love of the job, for the sense of belonging, for the tight circles of friendship, and to do their public service with pride in peacetime, on operations and in conflict.

It is a testimony to our friend, my former colleague-in-arms and a leading light of the UK Armed Forces LGBTI+ community that Commander Samantha Kinsey-Briggs MBE RN has brought together this essential and arguably historic publication which is a must-read for what was, what is and what must be protected in our future British Navy and Marines. It should also serve as a catalyst for others to take note of and follow.

Thank you, Sam and so many others, for your leadership and tenacity to get us collectively to this point in time and space. This document strongly reflects and reinforces that human rights apply at sea as they do on land.

David Hammond  
CEO, Human Rights at Sea

“I’ve never met a gay person who regrets coming out. You’re more at ease with your loved ones, your family and extended family, and your friends, and your employers, your employees. Everybody’s happy because they know where they are. It’s out in the open - and honesty’s the best policy.”

Sir Ian McKellen

## Introduction

As of November 2022, 11 countries have jurisdictions in which the death penalty is imposed for same-sex activity - at least 6 of these countries implement the death penalty<sup>1</sup>. This means that if you or your loved one identifies as LGBTQ<sup>2</sup>, you could be sentenced to death.

Industries which operate in a global context, such as the maritime industry, therefore carry the risk that some of their international employees, or, indeed, their families, may experience a legal system that condemns or criminalises them based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

This makes the illegality of same-sex activity, not just an abstract concept but a very real consideration for businesses and industries which operate in these countries or on vessels which fly their flag or operate in their waters.

The Royal Navy has a somewhat usual relationship with same-sex activity. Buggery became a capital crime in England and Wales in 1533, but regulations relating to buggery didn’t enter the Royal Navy until 1652, over 100 years later. The culture in the maritime community (and perhaps the Royal Navy at the time) seemingly accepted that men would have sex with each other whilst away from home for prolonged periods.

This more liberal approach was reversed when it came to the legalisation of homosexuality. The 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexuality in the UK generally, but it remained illegal in the Merchant Navy until 1994 and in the Armed Forces until 1993<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the relatively recent nature of the lifting of the ban on homosexuality within the Armed Forces, the Navy has managed to transform its culture significantly in recent years. This article explores lessons we might learn from the Navy’s experiences. The intention is to focus on the culture within the Royal Navy and how it has developed over the last 22 years.

Key lessons include the critical nature of senior leadership and their support in driving policy change, as well as demonstrating their commitment by living and breathing the policy, remembering and celebrating those who have fought for the changes and including the LGBTQ+ community in our rich history.

Commander Samantha Kinsey-Briggs MBE  
MA Royal Navy and Human Rights at Sea Advisory Board member

<sup>1</sup> Homosexual/lesbian activity is still criminalised more widely across 69 nations [www.humandignitytrust.org](http://www.humandignitytrust.org)

<sup>2</sup> LGBTQ+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Ace - List of LGBTQ+ terms ([stonewall.org.uk](http://stonewall.org.uk)) [To Note: Sexual orientation and Gender Identity is complex and evolving, the term LGBTQ+ is used in this article but does not exclude the broader spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identity].

<sup>3</sup> Dr Jo Stanley, Queer histories in the Navy | Royal Museums Greenwich ([rmg.co.uk](http://rmg.co.uk)), Queer Histories in the Navy, 8 Feb 16.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*I joined the Royal Marines (RM) in 1986, 17 years old.*

*Looking back, I was incredibly naive and was totally unprepared for the culture of the RM back then. Casual racism, sexism and homophobia was the norm.*

*Although I was aware of my own feelings, I had no idea what transgender was, but it was clear that it would be the sort of thing you were better off keeping to yourself. Women were banned from serving in the Marines, and cross-dressing was seen as a joke. Being transgender can be very confusing as your mind is telling you one thing, and your entire environment and experience is telling you another. In a way, the Marines were quite helpful in this situation as they were very binary with a simple “this is wrong and this right” approach to matters, which was reassuringly simple and easy to understand.*

*In my 30 years in the Marines - I saw a change in attitudes; being gay was no longer banned, and the first woman had passed the All-arms Commando course, but it seemed that some old-fashioned views and attitudes remained, especially within the cohort that I was part of and those attitudes were often expressed in private. Whilst I better understood myself and had ‘come out’ to a select few, I continued to remain in the closet to my work mates, peers and senior leadership.*

*Towards the end of my career in the RM, I got a chance to work with the Royal Navy (RN) and although those familiar attitudes were still common, I found less of the macho atmosphere, and I found it possible to be more open about myself. I transferred to the RN in 2017, and for the first time, my job was not stopping me from transitioning as women had been serving in the RN for decades. Compass network<sup>4</sup> was critical, and they were fantastic and really made me feel supported and not alone. This encouraged me to be even more open - I even started to attend LGBT+ events and shared my story. This, unfortunately, ended during the pandemic as I was medically discharged.*

*Whilst I have seen much change during my 34-year career, the older generation tends to hang on to values and ideas much more than the youth, and this can still sometimes be reflected not only in society but in organisations like the RM/RN. Whilst things have improved and are significantly better - there is always room for further improvement, and there is always much to learn and develop.*

*Chief Petty Officer Kirsty Fletcher (Royal Marine and Royal Navy Veteran)*

<sup>4</sup> Compass Network is the Royal Navy’s LGBT+ staff network.

## A Change in Law and Early Reactions

Despite unsuccessful litigation through the English Courts, on 27 Sep 1999, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the ban on gays and lesbians serving in the British Armed Forces was illegal<sup>5</sup>. This was already 8 years after the Foreign Office and both MI5 and MI6 changed their policies regarding LGBT+ personnel<sup>6</sup> in 1991. Interestingly, many of the UK's Allies had already lifted their bans on LGBT+ personnel serving in their Armed Forces by this time, perhaps a missed opportunity to learn lessons from their experiences and journeys.

Acknowledging resistance in the services against lifting the ban, the Secretary of State for Defence at the time, Geoff Hoon, said: "There will be those who would have preferred to continue to exclude homosexuals, but the law is the law. We cannot pick and choose the decisions we implement. The status quo is simply not an option." Iain Duncan Smith, the shadow defence secretary at that time, attacked the decision. "I believe and have always believed, as the previous government did, that we should follow the advice of the armed forces, which has always been that lifting the ban would adversely affect operational effectiveness."

### THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*"His speech\* had an air of apology and I winced and grimaced with each statement that sexual orientation was a 'private matter'. This was to be at the heart of the Armed Forces' way of managing what was seen as a highly challenging change. This was, of course, a policy born in a storm, an outcome of years of battle by the services, most senior officers. I often wondered if that time and effort could have been better used petitioning for improvements to the equipment desperately needed by our frontline troops throughout the 1990's. Was it naïve or wrong to hope for a triumphant statement heralding great change? Naïve or not, Hoon made a rueful and begrudged statement, and I couldn't help but think that he had examined all other options over a period of months before rising to the Commons that day."*

*Lieutenant Commander Craig Jones MBE Royal Navy (Veteran and FWP CEO)*

*\*[referring to Geoff Hoon's speech and the announcement on lifting the ban]*

<sup>5</sup> ECHR Lustig-Prean and Beckett v United Kingdom 31417/96 32377/96.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the law changing in England and Wales in the 1967 Act, there were still restrictions with 21 the age of consent and Private place stipulations: e.g. no hotels, had to be in own home and nobody else at home, not in communal space or single cabins); the age of consent for homosexual males was reduced to 18 by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 after an attempt to equalise the age of consent of 16 with that of the heterosexual age of consent.

<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Armed Forces in Oct 1992 and shortly afterwards, the Australian Defence Force: the Keating Government lifted the ban on gay and lesbian personnel serving on 23 Nov 1992, and in the US, the Clinton administration authorised the controversial 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' (DADT) policy.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, Craig. Fighting With Pride, LGBTQ in the Armed Forces (p83). 2019.

When change seemed inevitable, some senior officers resigned<sup>9</sup> in protest to policy changes, and many continued to argue forcefully in favour of maintaining the ban. Even when the ban was finally lifted on 12 Jan 2000, there was still a deep-rooted culture of homophobia, and senior resignations continued. It is worth noting that the tone of the language used in the Defence Council Instruction and the guidance issued at the time was one of caution. Whilst the law and policy had changed, the guidance outlined that sexuality was a private matter and therefore perhaps did not openly support the LGBT+ community immediately in being themselves. Effectively rendering the Royal Navy (and wider UK Armed Forces) 33 years behind civilian life, attracting and fostering a toxic environment and culture. Fortunately, the slow changes outside of the military began to permeate within; although the immediate years following this policy change remained toxic. Despite the change in policy, several LGBTQ+ personnel resigned, too, as a change in policy does not equal a change in culture or, indeed, acceptance. “Perhaps culture shift changes policy which then<sup>10</sup> fuels cultural change as policy normalises”. A key lesson for any organisation making a momentous shift should be early engagement with staff at all levels and prepare for inevitable periods of instability that may result as a change in culture/policy comes into effect.



9 British Army Brig Pat Lawless BBC News | UK | Brigadier quits over gays in military and Navy pilot – Cdr Colin Douglas Daily Mail - Lifting ban on gays in armed forces caused resignations. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/620178.stm> and <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-487750/Lifting-ban-gays-armed-forces-caused-resignations-report-reveals.html>

10 Lt Cdr Oliver Brown.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*“I joined the reserves shortly after the ban had been lifted. It was a scary time; whilst the threat of SIB (Special Investigation Branch) investigation and imprisonment had ended, I<sup>11</sup> feared being ‘outed’, I feared that policy was not backed up by culture. And my family were scared too - “the law may have changed, but that doesn’t mean attitudes have” my mum told me. One senior tried to blackmail me before I came out, and I tried to take my own life because of it. Once I did come out, I was bullied by some, but others showed respect. Respect for the courage to be me. And I knew the tide would turn. The tide had to turn.”*

*Surgeon Lieutenant Commander, Mike Hill Royal*

*Navy*

## Toxic Culture Shift - Senior Leadership

As law and civilian attitudes started to shift, a slow ripple could be felt within the Royal Navy, and the tide slowly began to turn. But it was not until late 2004 when, led by the First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Alan West, the Royal Navy decided to alter course. “Let us be quite clear: over the years, indeed centuries, LGBT+ personnel have served with loyalty and distinction at every level in our Armed Forces. And yet for most of that time we did not accept the fact; we put our heads in the sand and pretended the situation did not exist”<sup>12</sup> (Admiral Lord West GCB DSC PC).

The first Tri-Service LGBT conference was held at Amport House in 2005 (a significant venue noting it was the home of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy) and later, despite internal disagreement amongst Service Chiefs, the Royal Navy was allowed to march, in uniform, at Pride in London 2006. Vice Admiral Adrian Johns (Second Sea Lord at the time) said: “A significant number of Royal Navy lesbian and gay personnel ... are keen to give a strong personal signal that the Royal Navy is an inclusive employer of choice that welcomes and actively champions diversity in its workforce. Our mission is to break down barriers of discrimination, prejudice, fear and misunderstanding. Not only is this morally right, it is also for us in a fighting force the best way to deliver maximum operational effectiveness.” The Army and Royal Air Force (RAF) banned personnel from marching in uniform until 2008 when all 3 services marched at London Pride together for the very first time<sup>13</sup>. At that time, the Army’s General Sir Richard Dannatt was said to be concerned with a possible breach of the Queen’s Regulations, which bar military personnel from taking part in political activities, but later allowed Army personnel to join Royal Navy and RAF personnel, now a highlight and honour for personnel to attend. This was possibly the first public sign that there was top-level endorsement within the Navy in supporting the policy and that LGBTQ+ personnel were valued and accepted in the Royal Navy<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Outted’ in this context means to reveal the sexual orientation or gender identity of a person without their consent.

<sup>12</sup> Jones, Craig. Fighting With Pride, LGBTQ in the Armed Forces (px). 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Pride London’s delight at men in Uniform - Pink News.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that both the Army and RAF banned personnel marching at Pride in London in uniform until 2008 (although RAF and Army personnel could march in civilian clothing before 2008).

This senior level of support and leadership from the top was critical in ensuring the views of other senior officers changed and that the policy was accepted across the senior officer cadre. A good example of the historical link to the Royal Navy's meritocracy culture that was not as strong or developed in the other services. Regardless, the Royal Navy had several key individuals who were willing to challenge and, critically, senior leadership who listened and wanted to improve things. A key lesson and takeaway here is that we must take time to add their names into the history books and celebrate their fight and contribution to equality. People like Lt Cdr Craig Jones and Lt Cdr Mandy McBain must be remembered in history for leading the way in progressing this agenda.

**In addition to the critical role of senior leadership, the role of staff networks is vital. Staff networks provide support to marginalised personnel and can be powerful culture and understanding accelerators if supported. The Royal Navy's LGBT+ Forum (rebranded as Compass in 2013) was crucial in the early years' of post-policy change.**

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*“The LGBT Forum was now becoming an essential conduit for information to and from the Policy Desk. As the Chairperson, I was often consulted on changes and how things should be taken forward. It was empowering to work with those in the LGBT network who were happy to have their voices and opinions heard.....I was able to attend Stonewall's Workplace Conferences, which I did for many years as the Navy's only representative. Looking around me, it became apparent that others from the Navy Policy Team should also be attending. My attendance, especially when I was in uniform, generated much interest, and I was asked to talk to many different organisations about the progress on LGBT inclusion that had been made by the Navy since the military's standing start in 2000”*

*Lieutenant Commander Mandy McBain MBE (Veteran)*

**The vital role of staff networks, both in helping policy teams understand the lived experience as well as to support staff must not be underestimated. Senior leadership must support and champion staff networks to ensure there is both support for those from the community but also so that they can add value and contribute to policies that will affect them more broadly.**



15 Jones, Craig. Fighting With Pride, LGBTQ in the Armed Forces (p205). 2019.



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*As a Senior Leader and LBGT+ Advocate and Ally, I think it is vital that senior leadership are actively engaged with our staff networks and the broader community, as well as providing a platform for their voice. Whether opening a conversation up in the policy arena, acting as a sounding board or just being a visual and vocal Ally and Advocate - being seen and working with the community is critical. Every day has been a school day, and I regularly get it wrong! But no malice is intended, so you listen, learn and people explain and educate you and broaden your horizons and understanding. I'm humbled by the energy, committee and passion of the people in the RN COMPASS Network, and it is an utter privilege to work with them and play my small part. All they seek is betterment and inclusion.*

*As an operator, I have always seen things through the lens of operational output, and we, the Naval Service, need all our brilliant people to come to work and be the best that they can be. I always use the examples that if the young Royal Marines sniper is perplexed about his sexuality, he won't be completely focussed on calculating the windage effect of his shot, and if the female gay Radar Operator isn't able to be herself, she may lose concentration and miss the in-coming missile on her screen: we simply need to create an environment where people can be themselves, thrive and be themselves. Interestingly as a heterosexual man with three sons, I'm also in the privileged position to remind the community that they must teach and educate rather than 'hector', ensuring that inclusivity is a shared journey.*

*It has been and is a joy to work with the amazing COMPASS team and play my small part in inclusive leadership and helping our Service step into the future.*

**Lieutenant General Charlie Stickland CB OBE**  
**(Chief of Joint Operations and Royal Navy Senior LBGT+ Advocate)**

By 2008 the Diversity and Inclusion tide within the Royal Navy (but also more broadly amongst the British Armed Forces), from an LGBTQ+ perspective, was starting to turn. The Armed Forces joined the Stonewall Diversity Champions scheme and started to implement several initiatives that focused on supporting LGBTQ+ personnel within the Armed Forces. This landmark shift in policy implementation translated into a slow change in culture. The Values and Standards of the Armed Forces were now being aligned with the evolving approach to Equality & Diversity (a term used at the time), demonstrating an acceptance of the diversity business case and the downstream positive influence on recruiting and retention.

Progress continued throughout the late noughties, but one could argue that the pace was not fast enough. It was at this point that momentum for change was invariably led at a unit level by those committed to the cause and willing to devote time to it. Importantly, for many, it was also a decade where many came out to colleagues, but sadly, for fear of retribution, many remained silent.



## Gathering Speed and Momentum

In the teens, the momentum of culture change within the Royal Navy gathered speed. From groundbreaking achievements – such as featuring in the Stonewall Top 100 workplaces to be LGBT<sup>16</sup> to introducing key policy developments in a variety of areas, such as eligibility for Service Family Accommodation, to assistance with adoption and the Transition at Work Policy<sup>17</sup>; change was afoot and gaining pace. Senior leadership, again,

<sup>16</sup> The Royal Navy has been recognised three times for the Pink News Public Sector Equality Awards as well as placing in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index since 2007

<sup>17</sup> Joint Service Publication 889: Policy for the Recruitment and Management of Transgender Personnel in the Armed Forces (last updated in 2019).

played a crucial role. In 2013, As Co-Chair of the Royal Navy Compass Network, the author and Lt Cdr Chris Wood not only rebranded the network to make it the leading LGBTQ+ network in the Armed Forces, but also critically recruited the network's first Senior Advocate, Brigadier Peter Cameron Royal Marines. Whilst acceptance and support of the LGBT community was on the rise; there were still internal pockets within where toxic cultures still remained. The Royal Marines (an integral part of the Royal Navy) have a reputation for excellence on the battlefield but did have a reputation for perhaps not being as tolerant or accepting of the LGBT+ community. Having A senior Royal Marine as an advocate and ally enabled the organisation to reach those pockets of individuals and help educate and change attitudes. This demonstrates the critical nature of senior leadership, and the support they give.

## Changing the Conversation

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Today the Royal Navy (and indeed wider UK Armed Forces) is putting in place measures which are very much at the vanguard, not rear-guard. This is critical if we are to truly support and recognise all forms of self identification, particularly in the non-binary space. The Royal Navy has led the way here regarding dress and appearance, where those identifying as non-binary can choose options that most closely aligns with their gender. It is heartening to see that work continues in this space with regular reviews of uniform standards – acknowledging the change to societal norms as well as expectations from those serving and those with aspirations to join the Services. Whilst support for people living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) in the Armed Forces has been in existence from a welfare, and medical perspective, the recent drive to stamp out stigmatisation and to make HIV part of the routine conversation<sup>18</sup> is testament to the Royal Navy's commitment to not only drive policy but also in implementing the policy and making the conversation mainstream so that there is better understanding more widely in a bid to address stigmatisation. Education is critical to change the conversation and improve understanding of wider issues as well as those affecting the LGBT+ community.

Being gay, trans or non-binary is, for many, an ordinary feature of a person. As irrelevant as to whether they are a deck officer, chef, medic or indeed any other defining characteristic they identify with: or whether related to heritage, belief or any other protected characteristic<sup>19</sup> - it is simply the intersectional nature of an individual. Today there are some personnel who now join the Royal Navy who do not feel the need to join a staff network as they feel valued and accepted as they are, it is sometimes the wider public culture that some people find intimidating and threatening, and thus, many will seek internal support to deal with threats from outside of the organisation. An interesting dilemma and shift in culture is clear, although as the Services reflect society, there will no doubt continue to be small pockets or individuals who do not fully subscribe to the Royal Navy culture and ethos<sup>20</sup> or the values and standards expected from a diversity and inclusion perspective.

18 The sailor who turned the tide on HIV in the military | Military | The Guardian

19 As outlined in UK Equality Act 2010 - Protected characteristics | Equality and Human Rights Commission (equalityhumanrights.com)

20 RN ethos and diversity and inclusion

Since the legal decision in 1999 and the subsequent policy change in 2000, the last 2 decades have seen a steady alteration in the course of the Royal Navy's culture, although it was not until the teens or more recent early twenties that we saw a dramatic shift. Over the last 8-10 years, the Royal Navy has taken the lead with not only incredible senior leadership in support but also significant and routine policy changes as we become more aware and understand the diversity across our Service and civilian personnel.



## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*“As Director of People in the Royal Navy, for me, it is critical that our people feel valued and meet their potential. Our policies are aimed at supporting our personnel, from Joining the service well, to training, developing and living well and critically to leaving well and their life as a Veteran. Policy is constantly evolving - whether that is in response to changes in legislation or whether it better reflects society and changes within society. I am committed to ensuring that our LGBT+ (and from a broader intersectional perspective) community are involved with the conversation around policy and contributes to ensure that they, as all our people are, are able to be the very best that they can be.”*

*Rear Admiral Jude Terry OBE Royal Navy, Director People Royal Navy*

More broadly, and a critical lesson we need to learn going forwards, is that it took over 20 years for a true public formal apology regarding the ban. This came in the form of a statement by the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Johnny Mercer and the Minister of the Armed Forces, Anne-Marie Trevelyan in 2020 when co-hosting an event in the Houses of Parliament to mark the 20th anniversary of lifting the<sup>21</sup> ban. Accepting and acknowledging the wrongs of the past and apologising to those affected is a critical first step in restorative justice and the healing process. It is critical to recognise the failures of the past so we may look forward to a brighter future. Today, the families of serving personnel are unashamedly from a society of people whom we might increasingly find in uniform.



21 In 2007 a MOD Spokesperson provided an apology (Wg Cdr Phil Sagar) Defence ministry apologises for gay discrimination | UK news | The Guardian "Of course we're sorry for anyone who's suffered personal trauma," he said in comments broadcast today by BBC Radio. "We can't change the past and what's happened has happened. But if, as I'm sure you have, you've got testimony from people who feel that their lives have been ruined from this, then clearly that is not a good place to be." <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jun/28/gayrights.military>

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*“I've seen lots of societal change within the Naval Service over the years - the good, the bad, the ugly ... but I am full of hope for the future having played a small part in the catalyst for change (sometimes unknowingly) - I genuinely believe that you can effect change from the inside. When I joined, women did not go to sea and had to leave during pregnancy, but naively, we signed a contract agreeing to this as the expected norm. I have witnessed women 'be allowed' go to sea ... and have served onboard 2 ships myself - something that was only a dream on joining in 1987. I was onboard HMS SOMERSET when the government-imposed ban was lifted, and the Code of Conduct was announced. I have welcomed parity of policy for everyone - enhancing work/life balance and opportunity. Fast forward and I have gone from suppressing my feelings for a career I love to be able to express myself publicly in national Pride Campaign and speak LIVE on Sky News about the great work going on to support naval personnel. Recent experiences have included support through fertility treatment and the adoption process with my wife. So much has changed for the better - however, we cannot afford to become complacent - I am forever indebted to those who have gone before me, because if they did not do what they did then I would not have the experiences to achieve what I have and those following me would not have the opportunities yet to be afforded to them”.*

*WO2 Ann Miller-McCaffrey Royal Navy*

The charity, Fighting with Pride (FWP) was created in recognition of the fact that in the years since the ban, little had been done to find and support the thousands of veterans who lost careers, homes, families and livelihoods. As a result of the way they left the Armed Forces, some via prison sentences, many have faced homelessness, poverty and poor mental and physical health over prolonged periods, often resulting in a lack of career or long-term jobs. Tragically, for some, they are no longer with us today. In June 2021, FWP gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill. The Veterans Strategy Action Plan made provision for the LGBTQ+ Veterans Independent Review, which closed on 1st December 2022 and Veterans were actively encouraged to contribute. Whilst not the aim of the review, it does offer an opportunity for restorative justice, such that our LGBTQ+ veterans, who met the challenges of serving in the Armed Forces and so many other challenges placed in their path, can live later lives that are free of the shame of the way they were treated and with the comfort that we wish for all veterans. The review will enable the government to better understand the lived experience of LGBTQ+ veterans and better support them today and going forwards. There are numerous other charities<sup>22</sup> that have also recently supported, and still do actively support, the LGBTQ+ community, both serving and veterans alike.

<sup>22</sup> The RNA (Royal Navy Association) developed LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and hosted Defence at a stand at Manchester Pride in 2017, 2018, 2019. Royal British Legion (RBL) LGBTQ+ branch was established in 2019, The LGBT foundation set up Operation Equality in 2022. Veterans marched alongside the Defence contingent in 2019 (RBL LGBTQ+ branch) and invited Defence personnel to participate in the parade with them in Brighton in 2018 and 2019 and in Manchester in 2019. Both RBL and FWP marched with the Royal Navy in Brighton Pride in 2022.

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

*“I joined the Royal Navy in 2015 at the age of 22, I was classed as one of the ‘older’ guys in my intake. I was still not ‘out’ to family or many friends at that time but I ‘came out’ to my family in phase one of training having felt I was part of a great organisation with the support networks I needed. My family have served in the armed forces for seven generations and they have always been supportive of me throughout my career. I joined my first ship HMS DUNCAN and ‘came out’ to people onboard and everyone was incredibly supportive including my departmental coordinator who had a chat with me and made sure if I have any problems or negative comments directed at me to report directly back to him. This made me feel safe and valued as a member of the Ship’s Company.*

*Throughout my career I have had the full support of my chain of command and now I am a Royal Navy Photographer, where I get to support Compass network & the Royal Navy at Pride events around the UK. 2022 has been a momentous year for me as it has been the first time, I have been able to take part in pride, I was especially proud to represent the Royal Navy at London Pride. London Pride celebrated their 50th anniversary, and I was overwhelmed by the support the Royal Navy got as they marched through the streets of London.*

*I believe the culture towards the LGBTQ+ community within the Royal Navy is incredibly supportive, and we have come a long way in the past 20 years from what I have heard from my peers. It is great to see senior command showing their support, and hopefully, this will continue. Rear Admiral Paul Marshall CBE & Commodore Steve Prest attended Brighton pride this year as senior allies to support the Royal Navy marching in Brighton Pride for the first time, this shows great leadership in supporting personnel and my experience as a young gay man in the Royal Navy has been incredibly positive.”*

*Leading Photographer Chris Sellars Royal Navy*

Today, the Royal Navy continues to be at the forefront of LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and the leadership, innovation and, critically, the care that it is demonstrated to those who are serving is vital to maintain its operational effectiveness and ensure that all those who serve feel welcomed and assured that their contribution is valuable. The Royal Navy is all of one ship’s company, and we need to continue to nurture and develop our culture, be agile and embrace the changing conversation so that we can be truly Global, Modern and Ready - to Protect Our Nation’s Interests.

**This report has been drafted by Commander Sam Kinsey-Briggs MBE MA Royal Navy, HRAS (Human Rights at Sea) Advisor, November 2022**

## Conclusion

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"The British Royal Navy's story of change serves as a model for other maritime bodies and organisations. It shows that changes in law and policy are vital but that they are not enough on their own to change a culture. Law and policy will create the right context for change, but without effective leadership from supportive allies and mutual support amongst impacted individuals, change will not occur."

Martyn Illingworth  
Human Rights at Sea, Head of Operations





# Who We Are

## Background

Human Rights at Sea was established in April 2014. It was founded as an initiative to explore issues of maritime human rights development, review associated policies and legislation, and to undertake independent investigations of abuses at sea. It rapidly grew beyond all expectations and for reasons of governance it became a registered charity under the UK Charity Commission in 2015.

Today, the charity is an established, regulated and independent registered non-profit organisation based on the south coast of the United Kingdom. It undertakes **Research, Advocacy, Investigation and Lobbying** specifically for human rights issues in the maritime environment, including contributing to support for the human element that underpins the global maritime and fishing industries.

The charity works internationally with all individuals, commercial and maritime community organisations that have similar objectives as ourselves, including all the principal maritime welfare organisations.

## Our Mission

To explicitly raise awareness, implementation and accountability of human rights provisions throughout the maritime environment, especially where they are currently absent, ignored or being abused.

## Stay in Contact



We welcome any questions, comments or suggestions. Please send your feedback to:  
Human Rights at Sea, VBS Langstone Technology Park, Langstone Road, Havant. PO9 1SA. UK



Email: [enquiries@humanrightsatsea.org](mailto:enquiries@humanrightsatsea.org)



[www.humanrightsatsea.org](http://www.humanrightsatsea.org)



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As an independent charity, Human Rights at Sea relies on public donations, commercial philanthropy and grant support to continue delivering its work globally.



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OUR CONSULTANCY. INSTRUCT US



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