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GO FURTHER, FASTER

Celebrating LGBT+ role models
in the FE sector

***Creating an inclusive learning
& working environment***



Introduction

To celebrate LGBT History Month, WorldSkills UK brought together senior LGBT+ leaders and allies from across education, business and government to consider the challenges and opportunities faced by young people who identify as LGBT+ in the Further Education (FE) sector.

The discussion focused on how celebrating LGBT+ role models can help create a truly inclusive working and studying environment. The panel highlighted how authentic, out leadership and allies can inspire the next generation and enhance organisational performance. It also outlined the steps needed to fully embed a culture of acceptance, inclusion and respect across the sector.

Context

Rights, respect and recognition for people who identify as LGBT+ have come an incredibly long way in the UK over the past 50 years. Unfortunately, however, recent research has shown that there is still a real need to make progress on this front within the FE sector.

The National Society of Apprentices (NSOA) has said that many young people who identify as LGBT+ are not considering apprenticeships because they are worried about how their employers will react to them coming out¹. Stonewall's School Report 2017 identified that just one in four LGBT+ pupils know of an openly gay member of staff, and 22 per cent know of an openly lesbian member of staff². Recently there has been a media spotlight on schoolteachers who are aiming to transform these statistics by coming out, and the LGBTed education initiative designed to support teachers, launching last year³. There is, however, very little debate about this in colleges and little is being done to support LGBT+ leaders in FE and, with few LGBT+ role models or visible allies in leadership roles, the impact is potentially far-reaching.

Now, more than ever, the UK needs to harness young talent to drive a strong and productive economy. Research by Out Now shows that in most countries there is greater than 30 percent productivity gain achieved when LGBT+ workers feel able to be open with all their work colleagues⁴.

By supporting those who identify as LGBT+ in FE, we will give all young people the role models they need to succeed in their careers. Encouraging a truly inclusive sector ensures everybody has the confidence and support to choose a technical or professional career path, creating a workforce that reflects our society and is even more capable of driving UK productivity.

¹ <https://www.tes.com/news/role-models-are-important-lgbt-youngsters>

² <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017>

³ <http://lgbted.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.outnowconsulting.com/media/51271/finalreport-vodafone-final-04jul18asm.pdf>

Opportunities and challenges

There have been many positive advances in LGBT+ acceptance in FE over the past decades. There are instances of good practice in the sector, with two colleges (Newham College and City of Glasgow College) appearing in the Stonewall Top 100 Employers list. Nevertheless, significantly more needs to be done to support LGBT+ individuals who still face challenges working or studying at colleges and training providers across the UK.

Our panel highlighted the following opportunities for encouraging LGBT+ acceptance in FE:

Encouraging out leadership: Although anecdotally there may be a higher number of LGBT+ leaders in the FE sector, there is only a small number of teachers and principals who publicly identify as such. Creating a safe space for leaders to come out as strong role models will help signal a culture of acceptance throughout FE organisations as a first step towards creating a culture of inclusion.

Although diversity and inclusion (D&I) issues are at the forefront of many colleges' and training providers' agendas, those in leadership positions – whether they identify as LGBT+ or not – often do not feel qualified to address LGBT+ issues. Supporting leaders and giving them the tools and confidence to speak openly will help send the message that the sector in general is a welcoming, inclusive space in which to work and study.

Establishing a data-driven approach: A key issue for understanding the number of LGBT+ people in FE at all levels is a lack of relevant data with which to create a baseline and then measure progress. This includes both quantitative insights into representation and qualitative information on the lived experiences of LGBT+ people in the sector. Unfortunately, legal and practical restraints make this data difficult to access. As a result, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is working on gathering research on the experiences of LGBT+ people in apprenticeships and Stonewall is also involved in helping to capture data in order to determine positive or negative trends in the sector.

According to PinkNews, a recent poll shows that only 8-9% of under-24s identified as gay or lesbian. Although 50% identified as heterosexual, the rest of the respondents placed themselves on a spectrum of sexual orientation. As more young people do not define themselves as having a binary sexuality, the FE sector must become more attuned to this fluidity and how this can affect our understanding of LGBT+ issues.

Harnessing the power of networks: The panel identified the importance of working with local networks to ensure all initiatives have as wide a reach as possible. This includes working with unions such as the University and College Union (UCU) to ensure there is a support network and available resources specifically for LGBT+ educational professionals.

Other groups such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) play a key role in connecting with regional SMEs and ensuring that LGBT+ apprentices in these small businesses have access to key support networks. Membership groups such as the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) will also help create a network of resources and contacts to share best practice and encourage practical, engaging support for LGBT+ individuals.

Looking to the future: To a certain extent, the FE sector is still marked by historic legislation regarding LGBT+ issues. Regulations such as Section 28, which outlawed the promotion of homosexuality in schools, meant that historically many LGBT+ teachers were not able to come out openly in the classroom or address homosexuality in teaching. Although this legislation has since been repealed, its legacy can still affect those working in the sector.

We heard from Ann Limb, Chair of The Scouts, about her experience as a College Principal when Section 28 was in force:

“Back then it wasn’t easy to be seen as engaged in the ‘promotion of homosexuality’, and there wasn’t the same level of tolerance as today. Now the climate has changed and leadership can be out role models for the sector.”

It is important that teachers and students feel they are in a physically and psychologically safe space while at college and leaders have an important role to play in creating an environment in which such voices are heard without fear of repercussions.

Su’s story

We heard from Su Gough, Level 5 Project Management Apprentice at Lloyds Banking Group, on her experiences of coming out during her apprenticeship.

Su began her apprenticeship at the age of 30, moving from her unfulfilling former role to a place on Lloyd’s Banking Group’s Project Management Apprenticeship Programme. She spoke candidly of her experiences in her former job, where she found it difficult to be honest about her sexual orientation with her colleagues. Hurtful ‘banter’ and biphobic remarks meant that she wasn’t able to come out as bisexual in the workplace. Since starting her apprenticeship, however, Su has seen a real improvement in how LGBT+ people are treated in the workplace and feels more comfortable discussing her sexual orientation with her colleagues.

Central to this sense of acceptance were the strong LGBT+ role models she found at Lloyds Banking Group. Thanks to the organisation’s LGBT+ Rainbow Network, she found the support she needed to feel comfortable bringing her whole self to work.

Although biphobia and bisexual erasure are still present in many organisations, she is confident that with strong LGBT+ role models and more focused education from an early age, young LGBT+ people will continue to thrive in the workplace.

Role models for real change

With the legacy of Section 28 and wider social challenges faced by the LGBT+ community, the FE sector is lacking in strong, out role models to pave the way for others. It was agreed that it was important for young people to see themselves reflected in their study environment, showcasing the wide range of choices available regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

However, the panel felt that it was important that creating role models must not lapse into tokenism. Organisations should be careful not to tell the stories of a privileged few and role modelling must be adopted at all levels. In addition, intersectional role models are essential – representation should include people from *all* backgrounds. Visible LGBT+ role models should include Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young people, as well as those with special educational needs and disabilities, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Importantly, the panel felt that this cannot solely be the remit of LGBT+ senior leaders. Leadership should model inclusive behaviour regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or other protected characteristics. But it was acknowledged that leaders need to be given the right tools and support to showcase inclusive behaviours effectively and authentically. These tools could include lesson plans, such as those created by School's Out, or training in how to confidently give support and advice to young people or colleagues looking to come out. It was noted that this mindset has to be embedded in the culture of an organisation in order for role models to have a lasting, tangible impact on diversity and inclusion. What's more, colleges which have been placed in the Stonewall Top 100 Employer list could share their story with the wider sector, converting what they've done to actions that other colleges can replicate.

Embedding LGBT+ visibility into the curriculum

Schools OUT UK is on a mission to make schools safe and inclusive for everyone.

Introducing LGBT+ history, culture and role models in all subjects from an early age can help combat homophobia, biphobia and transphobia throughout the education system. Schools OUT UK provides a formal and informal support network for anybody who wants to promote equality, safety and visibility in education for LGBT+ people and all the protected characteristics. Visit www.the-classroom.org.uk for lesson plans that feature LGBT+ role models as part of their everyday narrative.

Engaging schools on these issues early in the curriculum helps shape attitudes to LGBT+ pupils and teachers, as students take their next steps into Further or Higher Education.

Schools OUT UK is part of a group of initiatives designed to increase the visibility and acceptance of LGBT people across society as a whole. This includes LGBT History Month in February each year (www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk), and the OUTing the Past Festival – an international celebration of LGBT+ history. You can find out how to get involved www.outingthepast.org.uk. These websites have extensive free resources that can be downloaded.

Creating a 'business case' for diversity

Many UK businesses are ahead of the FE sector in terms of D&I initiatives and public commitment to equality, driven by corporate social responsibility targets and mandatory reporting (for example, all companies with over 250 employees must publish the average pay across their organisation for both men and women). The growth of ally groups such as Lloyd's Banking Group's Rainbow Network shows a desire to build support networks to encourage confidence and authenticity in the workplace. In addition, the business case for a diverse business has already been proven, with research to show that diverse leadership directly correlates to increased earnings⁵. In this way, many UK businesses are making significant progress in increasing the diversity of their workforce.

By mirroring these tactics, it was felt that FE institutions could both increase LGBT+ visibility and align themselves with the world of work – defining a strong 'business case' for LGBT+ acceptance, creating networks for staff and pupils and setting ambitious targets for inclusion.

Establishing such links with businesses could have a three-fold impact: giving young people the confidence to enter the world of work as their whole selves, proving the tangible benefits of D&I initiatives for all organisations and another route to improving further links between colleges and employers.



Conclusions

This roundtable discussion demonstrated that there is a real desire to bring about change from across the sector and beyond. By working together, it was felt we can create a more inclusive environment where more LGBT+ young people have direct access to role models who can inspire them to pursue apprenticeships and technical career routes.

There has traditionally been very little opportunity to discuss the challenges and benefits of authentic leadership for those who identify as LGBT+, particularly in leadership roles. However, confidence in authentic leadership has been proven to drive performance and productivity gains in all sectors.

By supporting LGBT+ leadership and creating a vocal ally network, the panel felt that we could encourage more young people to consider taking an apprenticeship or technical training route, ensuring we are creating a new generation of confident high flyers that can help drive UK businesses forward.

WorldSkills UK will continue to support initiatives to champion LGBT+ inclusion in FE, as part of its broader work programme on diversity, inclusion and social mobility, and will look to collaborate with sector bodies such as AoC and Collab Group exploring further with their member organisations.

What can the FE sector do to encourage positive change?

It was agreed that no one organisation in the sector can be held responsible for making these important changes – we must all work together in partnership to create a truly diverse and inclusive workplace. To succeed, we should:

- **Share stories and create role models:** by joining groups such as the Young Apprenticeship Ambassador Network, young LGBT+ apprentices can share their stories and become real-life, sought-after role models to inspire the next generation. The sector could also explore how role models could be honoured and celebrated at annual industry awards.
- **Develop a data-driven, strategic approach:** Organisations must consult on what data can be collected regarding LGBT+ individuals. Once available, this information could be used to enhance reporting and drive change.
- **Work with unions:** The sector could engage with unions on these issues, with unions working with employers and trade bodies, like AoC and Collab Group, to drive LGBT+ inclusion as a key agenda.
- **Provide training for staff:** Leaders and staff in FE could lead and teach in an LGBT+ inclusive way. It is essential that leaders and staff are confident to have conversations with young people to support them in coming out and preparing them for the workplace. Good practice has already been highlighted in the sector, with Newham College and City of Glasgow College placed in the Stonewall Top 100 Employers list – this success should be celebrated and shared across the sector, in collaboration with AoC and Collab Group.

WorldSkills UK was joined by the following sector leaders at this roundtable event:

Helen Grant MP – Chair
David Hughes, CEO, AoC
Ian Pretty, CEO, Collab Group
Andrew Harden, Head of FE, University and College Union (UCU)
Jessica Bushell, Employer Engagement Strategy Senior Manager, DfE
Ann Limb, Chair, The Scouts
Janet Gardner, Deputy Principal, Newham College of Further Education
Stephen Exley, FE Editor, Tes
Sue Sanders, founder, LGBT History Month
Mo Wiltshire, Director of Education and Youth, Stonewall
Jonathan Howe, Emerging Talent Lead, Lloyds Banking Group
Su Gough, apprentice, Lloyds Banking Group
Mark McBride-Wright, Founder, Equal Engineers
Susan Kitchner, Director, People Plus
Ben Cohen, Founder, PinkNews
George Ryan, FE Reporter, Tes
Cai Wilshaw, PinkNews

WorldSkills UK is all about helping young people to go further, faster in their careers, gaining the skills that employers need most. We help young people from all backgrounds get the best start in work and life.

To help further our understanding of LGBT+ inclusion in the FE sector, we have embarked on some ground-breaking research in collaboration with The Social Innovation Partnership. This research is designed to further our understanding of young people's engagement in technical education and vocational skills. As well as exploring some of the barriers faced by LGBT+ young people entering the sector, the research will also explore the experiences, perceptions and barriers from other traditionally underrepresented groups, including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people; young women in STEM subjects; young people with special educational needs and disabilities; and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Given WorldSkills UK's dedication to supporting the next generation of highly skilled professionals, our ambition for this research is to uncover sector-wide learnings to inform, innovate and drive inclusive practices in FE. The insights, recommendations and inclusion interventions to be informed by this research will ensure that we – along with our partner organisations – are equipped to give all young people the best start in work and life.

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