

DR CLAIRE DAVIES: CHAMPIONING LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN STEMM



DR CLAIRE DAVIES FOUNDED PRISM, A NETWORK FOR LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN STEMM, FOLLOWING DISCUSSIONS WITH VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS TO THE INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS STALL SHE ORGANISED FOR EXETER PRIDE IN 2018.

In her day job, Claire is a research fellow in the Astrophysics Group of the College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences at the University of Exeter. Insight talks to Claire about why she founded PRISM and the organisation's aims.

What inspired you to found PRISM?

Personally, I feel that a lot more can be done to be fully inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals working and studying in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) but also to promote STEMM subjects within LGBTQ+ communities. There are initiatives which aim to do this on a national scale (LGBT STEM and Pride in STEM, for instance) but, before PRISM, nothing more local to the South West of England. PRISM was launched on July 5th 2018, coinciding with the first "International Day of LGBTQ+ people in STEMM", with an open event to discuss what an Exeter-wide LGBTQ+ STEMM network could provide.

PRISM MANIFESTO

- A space for local STEMM workers and students to meet and share ideas with fellow LGBTQ+ people and allies of the LGBTQ+ community;
- A platform for the work of LGBTQ+ scientists, engineers, technicians/technologists, mathematicians, and medics to be championed and celebrated;
- An opportunity for the successes (and failures) of local and national equality, diversity and inclusivity initiatives to be shared amongst Exeter-based STEMM employers.

How can SMEs interact with PRISM?

At present, PRISM is focussed on providing a quarterly talk series and networking event for STEMM

employees and students (our "PRISM Speakers" series). SME employees and owners are welcome to attend these events, regardless of their gender, sexuality and physical characteristics (sex). We are in the process of creating a web page which will feature a direct "contact us" section but, for now, we invite interested persons to reach out to us via our social media accounts.

As a network, we provide an element of community. A diverse workforce has been repeatedly shown to have a positive economic impact. The availability of an LGBTQ+ network, particularly one for individuals in STEMM fields, can help to attract individuals who may not be familiar with Exeter and be drawn to the multicultural nature of bigger cities.

What can businesses do to ensure they are fostering a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ people?

Business leaders should seek to exploit the acknowledged benefits of all types of diversity (LGBTQ+, age, race, professional background etc) at all levels of their business. In our case, treat LGBTQ+ people like everybody else, respect their choices and get to know them as colleagues and friends who are working with you to achieve the business objectives. Reach out to us when you need help although there are many "best practices" guides available online which contain information on providing a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals, most notably on Stonewall's webpages.

Immediate actions include calling out homophobic, transphobic, and biphobic language, even "casual" slurs such as those classified as "banter"; using neutral language when referring to persons whose gender and pronouns you do not know, such as

an employee's partner, respecting an individual's pronouns and encouraging all employees to include pronouns on email signatures; removing gender-specific uniform or dress-code policies; considering the safety and requirements of LGBTQ+ individuals when choosing venues for work socials and business trips and ensuring it is easy and simple for employees to change their name, including making allowances for employees wishing to have different professional and legal names.

Can you give any examples of how PRISM has celebrated the work of LGBTQ+ people working in STEMM?

We have had "LGBTQ+ role models in science" leaflets, originally designed by Joby Razzell Hallis, printed which were originally given out at Pride 2018 and are available at our PRISM Speakers events - these feature more well-known individuals from recent history (cryptographer Alan Turing and astronaut Sally Ride) together with currently active scientists (computer scientist Lynn Conway, chemist David Smith, and astrophysicist Nergis Mavalvala).

Through PRISM Speakers, we've provided a platform for Sally Basker (CEO of Exeter Science Park), Sophie Fardell-Rudd (principal technical officer for Network Rail), Agnes Bacon (Nanomaterials PhD student), and James Claverley (science governance co-ordinator at the National Physical Laboratory), to speak about the amazing work they do. In January 2019, I provided a summary of the fourth annual LGBT STEMinar series at a PRISM Speakers event. The national STEMinar series event particularly celebrated the efforts of Beth Montague-Hellen, founder of charitable

organisation, LGBT STEM, and the LGBT STEMinar series as well as highlighting the wide-ranging research being conducted across the UK and abroad by LGBTQ+ researchers.

What do you wish other people knew about your work?

The work I do as PRISM is voluntary and in my own time. I fit this in around my research and other commitments and responsibilities I have within the department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Exeter. And none of what has been achieved through PRISM could have been done without the work and support of the PRISM coordinators.

Why are PRISM, and other LGBTQ+ In STEMM initiatives, important now and for the future?

GLOBAL

70

70 countries across the world criminalise Male-Male homosexual relationships (45 criminalise both Male-Male & Female-Female relationships);



In over half of the world's countries (including in 28 US states),

LGBTQ+ people may not be legally protected from workplace discrimination.

UK

10%

More than 10% of trans individuals experienced verbal abuse and 6% have been physically assaulted at work.

45%

45% of LGBTQ+ school students - including 64% of trans pupils - are bullied for being LGBTQ+ in Britain's schools.

STEMM-SPECIFIC



Undergraduate LGB+ students are less likely to be retained within STEM (survey did not include trans individuals nor medicine).



Out* STEM faculty at universities (survey did not include medicine) are 7.2 times more likely to experience exclusionary behavior by their colleagues.

References: Stonewall (2018); Engendered Penalties, The Equality Review (2007); The School Report, Stonewall (2017); Coming out in STEM, Science Advances (2018); Factors Impacting the Academic Climate for LGBQ+ STEM Faculty, Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering (2014).