DR CLAIRE DAVIES: CHAMPIONING LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN STEM M

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) and to promote STEM fields within LGBTQ+ communities. There are initiatives which aim to do this on a national scale (e.g., Pride in STEM) but, before PRISM, nothing more local to the South West of England. PRISM was launched on July 5th 2019, coinciding with the first “International Day of LGBTQ+ people in STEM”, with an open event to discuss what an intersex-wide LGBTQ+ STEMM network could provide.

PRISM MANIFESTO
- A space for local STEM workers and students to meet and share ideas with their LGBTQ+ peers 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 inclusion initiatives to be shared amongst gender-based STEMM employers.

How can SMEs interact with PRISM? At present, PRISM is focused on providing a quarterly talk series and networking event for STEMM employees and students (our “PRISM Speakers’ series”). SME employers and owners are welcome to attend these events, regardless of their gender, sexuality, and/or other identities (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 partners 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 STEM fields, can help to attract individuals who may not be familiar with intersex 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+, gender, race, professional background etc.) at all levels of their business. In our case, that: 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 practice" guides available online which contain information on providing a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals, most notably on Stonewall’s webpages. Immediate actions include: benzoyl peroxide, transexual, and bilingual language, even "normal" slurs such as those classified as "bantam", 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 LGBTQ+ people are not made to feel alienated.

How do you wish other people knew about your work? We are working with a variety of people in a range of roles in science (astrocytologist Alan Turing and mathematician David Smith, and astrophysicist Nergis Mowad). Through PRISM, we have provided a platform for Sophie Baker (CEO of EcoArt Science), Sophie Fawcett-Rudd (principal technical officer for Network Rail), Agnes Doun (Nonaccredited PhD student), and James Cowen (Science and Engineering Research Council) to speak about the amazing work they do. In January 2019, I provided a summary of the fourth annual LGBT Stem minar series at a PRISM Speakers event. The national STEMminar series event particularly celebrated the efforts of Rachel Montague-Hoover, founder of charitable organisation, LGBT STEM, and the LGBT Stem minar series as well as highlighting the wide-ranging research being conducted across the UK and abroad by LGBT+ researchers.

Why are PRISM, and other LGBT+ initiatives, important now and for the future? Understanding and celebrating diversity is increasingly important as the workplace becomes more and more diverse. PRISM’s mission is to help create a more inclusive and diverse STEM workplace, one where LGBTQ+ individuals feel welcome and valued. We believe that diversity and inclusion are not just about compliance but about creating a more innovative and productive workplace.


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

In her daily 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.

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