



Civil Service



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LGBT History Month 2016

Written by Sue Owen, Permanent Secretary for DCMS and the Civil Service LGB&TI Champion on 1 March 2016

Over the past four weeks people across the country have been celebrating [LGBT History Month](#) [1]. The theme for this year was 'Religion, Belief and Philosophy', and so it was fitting that the Civil Service played a part by organising its own series of events.

I was proud to see so many departments and agencies involved in the celebrations. The [Civil Service Rainbow Alliance \(CSRA\)](#) [2] helpfully collated some of the highlights and posted details on their website. They included 'Getting and sustaining senior championship for [LGBT](#) [3] networks in our Public Sector organisations' in Bristol by the Environment Agency, 'LGBT role models of faith', and 'Transgender Role Models' in London by the Home Office, and a lecture on this year's theme 'Religion, Belief and Philosophy' in London jointly by the Cabinet Office and Parliament.

Changing attitudes

Within the lifetime of many serving civil servants homosexuality was a criminal offence.

Decriminalisation came in 1967 following publication of the [Wolfenden Report](#) [4]. LGB people have only been allowed to serve openly in the military since 2000. It wasn't until 2001 that the age of consent was equalised in Great Britain and then in Northern Ireland. The Gender Recognition Act came into play in 2004, giving legal recognition to people who wanted to change their gender. Civil Partnerships became legal in 2005, and same-sex marriage became legal in 2014 in Great Britain, but remains illegal in Northern Ireland.

The hierarchies of many of the major religions in the UK remain largely opposed to LGBT equality within their own traditions and practices. So it is an important and timely topic that hopefully has led to deeper understanding all round.

The UK continues to be in the forefront of LGB&TI (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex) equality. The UK now has more out LGB MPs than any other parliament in the world.

In my own [Department of Culture, Media and Sport](#) [5], we have seen an explosion of stories about transgender people on television, in films and in the news. It can't be underestimated how important this is in helping to raise awareness throughout the population. Beginning with the London 2012 Olympics, we saw a number of high profile athletes and sports stars coming out and stepping up as positive role models. Most sports now have well known LGB men and women competing on the world stage. Even in football, although there it's women taking the lead. There are no out top league male players, which shows that there is still more work to do.

Why we must continue to stand up

Some people may wonder why we continue to celebrate LGBT History Month, given that most of the legal barriers against LGB&TI people appear to have been overcome. Last year [Public Health England collated a range of health risks that affect LGB&TI people](#) [6], and it was a shocking picture. In just about every category, LGB&TI people face significantly higher risks in terms of rates of suicide, self-harm and other mental health issues, sexual health, as well as tobacco, alcohol and drug related illnesses. And the picture is even bleaker for minority ethnic LGB&TI people.

That's why I am so passionate in my work as Civil Service LGB&TI Champion, and why I strongly support the work of LGB employee network, the Civil Service Rainbow Alliance (CSRA) and the trans and intersex employee network, [a:gender](#) [7]. I also chair the board of trustees of the [Charity for Civil Servants](#) [8], who do fine work supporting health and wellbeing for serving and retired Civil Servants. These are vital resources which provide a life-line for many.

Widening inclusion

As the culmination to the month-long celebration, Stephen Foreshow-Cain, Executive Director of [Government Digital Service](#) [9], and Cabinet Office LGBT Champion, introduced the joint event on behalf of the Cabinet Office LGBT Network and [ParliOut](#) [10], the LGBTIQ network for Parliament, on this year's theme: LGBT History Month Talk:, Religion, Belief and Philosophy.



The panel from UCL's Science and Technology Studies department

Participants were treated to a panel of academics from University College London's Science and Technology Studies department, who gave a fascinating talk on the history of classification and categorisation relating to gender and identity. Food for thought as we grapple with these same issues in our work to widen inclusion in the Civil Service.

And finally, I am delighted to join with Alison Stanley, Director of Civil Service Employee Policy, in endorsing the newly updated guidance produced by a:gender, [The Workplace and Gender Reassignment](#) [11]. This guidance will be used as the basis for a new Civil Service policy which will be published by July 2016. In the meantime, I would encourage departments and agencies who haven't already done so, to make this available to your own employees.

View the online article here; <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2016/03/01/lgbt-history-month-2016/> [12]

Sue Owen, Permanent Secretary for DCMS and the Civil Service LGB&TI Champion

Source URL: <http://www.diversityandinclusionawards.com/blog/lgbt-history-month-2016>

Links

[1] <http://lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/>

[2] <http://csra-uk.com/>

[3] <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/tag/lgbt/>

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfenden_report

[5] <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/tag/dcms/>

[6] <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2015/02/04/improving-health-equality-for-gay-bisexual-and-other-msm-why-now-and-how/>

[7] <http://www.agender.org.uk/>

[8] <https://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/>

[9] <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/tag/gds/>

[10] <http://www.parliament.uk/parliout>

[11] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-workplace-and-gender-reassignment>

[12] <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2016/03/01/lgbt-history-month-2016/>