

NEU LGBT+ Conference 2018 – Northern Region Report

Delegates in attendance – Francis Zielinski, Kirsty Law and Andy Bond

“The most dangerous words in any language are... We’ve always done it this way.”

As teachers, we are inherently swayed by delivering lessons that we know work based on previous experiences, recommended, tried and tested schemes of work and personal preferences. But, do we honestly and regularly reflect on what we deliver to ensure the children we teach are supported not just academically but emotionally and socially? The day to day pace in schools has quickened and it is easy to forget that we have children in our care struggling with their identity. How can we support them?

The message from conference this year could not have been any clearer or stronger. **Times are changing** and with this so are our children. It is our responsibility to support those who may be dealing with issues surrounding their identity and are looking for role models or someone with the knowledge to help them within their immediate community.

After conference, there were many conversations that took place with regards to how individuals were to transfer their knowledge and deliver training within their own schools. As a result of the weekend, some felt empowered, some cautious and some overwhelmed. The underlying theme however was being visible within the community and ensuring that everyone was given the opportunity to share their understanding of what LGBT+ means and then how to educate both students and staff in a manner which promotes equality and respect.

The training provided this year was of the highest standard and gave the delegates the knowledge, resources and support in order to promote equality and respect. Francis, Kirsty and myself attended different seminars and workshops and all came away feeling positive and empowered to be the role models and advocates for the children and staff in our schools.

The keynote speakers for the weekend ‘Fox and Owl’ were sensational and gave us a true insight into the lives of trans children. They shared inspirational stories and brought across the powerful message of finding your true identity. They tackled the issues surrounding an individual’s right to choose, acceptance and tolerance and most important of all, that times are changing and that we can support this by being visible and being there for those children who need someone they can trust.

As well as learning how to educate and celebrate LGBT+ in schools it was important to hear about the discrimination, persecution and abuse that still exists owing to an individual’s right to declare their sexuality, gender or life-style. These case studies and stories were hard to listen to and to some of us incredibly relatable. It was essential to be given small amounts of reflection time and the opportunity to talk to the other delegates. The result of many of these discussions were positive outcomes, success stories and strategies which could be put in place. Things that **we could do to make a change**.

Everyone is guilty of making mistakes, missing the mark or forgetting. But no-one should be guilty or ignorant. As professionals we have the power to make steps to correct old equality and inclusion policies, promote an individual’s right to be who they want to be. We cannot do this alone and must work together with our partners in education to ensure, to the best of our ability, that our pupils and colleagues do not fear persecution just because of who they are and who they want to love.

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Our Next Steps

- To monitor the outcomes of the agreed priority motion. 'Rule change to disciplinary and appeals procedures: Supporting LGBT+, black, and disabled members against discrimination and harassment.'
- Make a move within our own schools to be visible and promote LGBT+ through educating staff and pupils, promoting acceptance and tolerance and show ourselves to be positive role models.
- Attend local NEU meetings to share and represent LGBT+.

Conference this year provided a comfortable and inclusive environment, allowing those who may have felt excluded or isolated, to feel part of a community where you could be yourself. The three of us felt hugely grateful to spend time in such an environment which is alien to where we live and to be given the chance to network with other teachers, trainers and those who support what we do in education.

We would proudly represent our division at the next LGBT+ conference and continue to make a difference.