Taking PRIDE in STEM

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The opinion that scientific logic can only come from a certain type of person, a certain gender, a certain background is outdated. Such rigid expectations of what a researcher, an engineer, a technician should be is pushing a stereotype that can stop sectors from reaching their true potential. Solving these problems requires a continued revolution in how we do research, talk about research, and what we expect from innovation.

There have been phenomenal strides in LGBTQ+ rights all across the world in many fabrics of society, though until recently there has been relatively little research into the climate that LGBTQ+ professionals in research positions operate in.

A 2019 report published by the Institute of Physics, Royal Astronomical Society, and Royal Society of Chemistry, highlighted that the overall climate experienced by LGBTQ+ professionals in physical sciences could be highly variable. Almost one in three respondents stated that they had considered leaving the workplace because of discrimination, and a similar number had witnessed exclusionary behaviour. The report recognised that comfort levels are on the increase, yet almost 50 per cent agreed there was a lack of overall awareness of LGBTQ+ issues in the workplace.

A previous report from the US Centre for Talent Innovation stated: “Companies that harness both innate diversity in their workforce and acquired diversity in leadership are measurably more innovative than companies that fail to harness these drivers”.

Focusing on inclusive work environments, UK Research and Innovation has held activities including training and events across the organisation to champion diversity in research and innovation. Highlights have included joining the international LGBTSTEM day events at the Science and Technology Facilities Council’s (STFC) campuses - designed to bring the research and innovation community together to hear from LGBTQ+ speakers from across the research environment to discuss their work and their journeys. We look forward to continuing this dialogue as we continue to foster an equal, inclusive and diverse research and innovation landscape.

Celebrating its three-year anniversary in 2020, LGBTSTEM Day on 18th November is a celebration of how far we’ve come, but also a stark reminder that the battle is far from won. It is clear that the research sector and broader workplace need to continue to encourage a culture where people can bring their “whole selves” to work towards a more equal, diverse and inclusive approach.

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