



Pride 2020 Reflections

#LegalPride2020

As Pride month draws to a close, I thought I would take a few moments to reflect on the importance of Pride and my experience of practising as an LGBTQ+ lawyer.

This year, Pride undoubtedly feels different. The Coronavirus pandemic has inevitably prevented symbolic Pride marches and celebrations across the world from taking place in the way we all know and love. Whilst many physical parades have been cancelled or postponed, Coronavirus has not stopped the LGBTQ+ community from finding alternative ways to celebrate Pride.

For example, on Saturday, Pride in London, the largest Pride event in the UK, held its first ever digital Pride parade. Iconic landmarks such as Piccadilly Circus and the BT Tower were taken over, to broadcast the names and images of the hundreds of community groups that would have marched through London but for Coronavirus.

Just because we cannot celebrate Pride in a way we usually do, does not mean, however, that we can forget the historical and ongoing importance of Pride.

June is Pride month because it marks the [Stonewall riots and protests](#) that changed LGBTQ+ rights for many people in America and beyond. On 28 June in 1969, an uprising took place at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. The Stonewall Inn was raided by police in the early hours resulting in three nights of unrest as the LGBTQ+ community fought back against police brutality and prejudice.

The Stonewall uprising took place in the context of broader civil rights movements, including the Gay Liberation Front. A British chapter of the movement was established in October 1970, with the first UK Pride march taking place a few years later in London on 1 July 1972.

Homosexuality between two men aged 21 was partially decriminalised in the UK in 1967. Years later the age of consent was equalised, restrictions abolished, and the prohibition on teaching about same-sex relationships in schools removed. In 2004, same-sex couples were afforded the right to form a Civil Partnership. In 2010, the Equality Act was passed creating significant legal protections against prejudice and discrimination not only for the LGBTQ+ community, but for a range of diversity strands with the introduction of protected characteristics. In 2013, same-sex couples were finally granted the legal right to marry.

Significant progress to protect LGBTQ+ rights has been made, however, we must ensure that we work together to continue to raise awareness and foster an inclusive culture within the legal profession and an inclusive society

through the work we do within our local communities. In my view, Pride presents us all with an opportunity to not only celebrate diversity but also to take stock about how we improve inclusion.

When I first started working in the legal profession as a Paralegal shortly after University, I had reservations about how open to be with colleagues about my personal life and whether being a gay man would impact my career. It was a struggle to know what to expect. What helped me to feel comfortable, safe and able to talk about my husband with colleagues was the firm's visible Equality group led by Senior Partners of the firm. Some of those Senior Partners were members of the LGBTQ+ community, others were allies. Knowing that the Senior Leadership of the firm were actively promoting an inclusive culture through a variety of initiatives with visible role models really helped to ease my anxiety.

I will be forever grateful for the Equality group and the initiatives the firm ran at the time I joined because it helped me to realise early on in my legal career the value my colleagues and more importantly my clients gain from me being me, practising as an LGBTQ+ lawyer. My proudest achievements include citing the Oath of the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives when I qualified as a Fellow and marrying my husband. The two go hand in hand because I would not be who I am without one or the other. It is for this reason that since joining Lester Aldridge, I have been working closely with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee to roll out a 3 year plan in which we seek to raise awareness of diversity aligned with the Law Society's Diversity Charter. As Bournemouth Pride has been cancelled this year, we are holding a series of digital events to ensure that as a firm we celebrate Pride and continue to raise awareness.

My concluding thoughts are as follows: the medium in which Pride month has taken place this year may be different; however, the meaning remains the same. Pride is more than a celebration of diversity and the LGBTQ+ community in the month of June. It is an opportunity to reflect and consider what we can do to ensure we fulfil our collective responsibility to drive forward promoting an inclusive legal profession and an inclusive society which celebrates all strands of diversity and protects against prejudice.

If you would like any further information on any of the digital events that will be taking place, please email online.enquires@la-law, to contact our Chartered Legal Executive, [James Pantling-Skeet](#).