



Pride Reflections – #LegalPride2021

June is Pride month. In a pre-COVID world, we would ordinarily see Pride marches and celebrations beginning in June, which span across the summer months nationwide. As a society, we have undoubtedly come a long way in raising awareness of LGBTQ+ issues and campaigning for freedoms that will allow the LGBTQ+ community worldwide, regardless of their race, faith, sexuality, gender or disability, to live their lives on a genuinely equal footing. Nevertheless, Pride month remains important because as a society, we must acknowledge that prejudice, bias and inequality continue to exist. It is our collective duty to continue raising awareness, tackling such inequality.

The History

For those who may not be aware, June is Pride month because it marks the Stonewall riots and protests that changed LGBTQ+ rights for many people in America and the world. On 28 June 1969, an uprising took place at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, which was raided by the police in the early hours resulting in three nights of unrest and police brutality. The Stonewall uprising took place in the context of broader civil rights movements, such as 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 couples removed. The Civil Partnership Act was introduced in 2004 and the Equality Act 2010 paved the way for fundamental legal protections against prejudice and discrimination. Happily for me, in 2013, same-sex couples were finally granted the legal right to marry, meaning I was able to marry my wonderful husband in the summer of 2017.

Do inequalities still remain?

Progress has undoubtedly been made. Society in the UK is a very different place. The changes which have happened in my lifetime are significant, which can only be to the benefit of new generations seeking equality. Indeed many countries across the world have proactively tackled prejudice, bias and inequality. There are, however, many countries where significant inequality remains. According to the ILGA, homosexuality remains illegal in circa 70 countries. In some countries, homosexuality remains punishable by death. Gay news organisations often report on members of the LGBTQ+ community disappearing without a trace, which is concerning.

Blood donation rights

On 14th June 2021, we received the welcome news that the rules preventing gay men from donating blood have finally been changed. Under the new rules, donors will no longer be asked if they are a man who has had sex with another man, removing the element of the assessment which is prejudicial. Instead, any individual who attends to give blood, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, will be asked if they have had sex and, if so, about their behaviours. Anyone who has had the same sexual partner for the last three months will be eligible to donate. This is great news and marks a further significant step for our society in reducing inequality.

Law Society's survey

As workplaces form part of our society, it is really positive to hear that the Law Society's LGBTQ+ survey, which took place in February 2021 found that 53% of LGBTQ+ respondents felt able to be themselves in the workplace. Over 90% had colleagues who were not LGBTQ+ themselves but were supportive and active allies for LGBTQ+ equality in their workplaces. Of concern, however, is that 41% of respondents felt they could only be themselves in the workplace some of the time and a quarter of the legal profession had experienced homophobia, biphobia or transphobia in the workplace. The majority of incidents were not reported either because they felt it was not serious enough to report formally or because they lacked confidence that it would be resolved directly. It is positive that progress has been made, but the survey results demonstrate that as a profession, we still have work to do to ensure we achieve true equality.

What can we do?

It is vital that we all take responsibility for continuing to actively tackle bias, prejudice and inequality both in society but also within the workplace. We have a collective and legal duty to do so. As a gay man practising in the legal profession, I know first-hand how important it is to feel able to be yourself for the benefit of your clients but also so that you feel able to progress.

We all need to ensure we familiarise ourselves with using the correct pronouns in the workplace and the importance of not assuming a pronoun. The Law Society has published some helpful guidance available [here](#).

We need to create a truly inclusive culture, where every firm has visible LGBTQ+ role models and ambassadors to promote inclusivity at all levels. As a trainee entering the legal profession, I found joining the active equality group was important to helping me to be myself with colleagues and feeling safe. Continuing to share the experiences of members of the LGBTQ+ community who have progressed to management roles is so important to tackling any perception that being a part of this community may be a barrier to progression. There are some fantastic podcasts on the Law Society's website, talking about experiences at all levels, from trainees to Managing Director which are well worth a listen ([click here](#)).

We need to raise awareness of same-sex parents and the things not to say. A Partner at Kingsley Napley recently shared a really insightful article highlighting this issue based on her experience, which is [available here](#).

Finally, we need to work together to ensure that every firm has a very clear policy and process for the reporting of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia in the workplace. It is deeply concerning that so many respondents to the Law Society's LGBTQ+ survey did not report incidents of this nature.