

Committee Statement re Schools & Gender Diversity Event

In the interest of transparency this version of the blog has been updated since the original was circulated to our members on the 13th of November and this blog was initially posted here the 14th November 2019. The updates are intended to provide clarification on some of the concerns we have cited and new information that has come to light since the time of writing.

Dear Staff Pride Network Members,

An event entitled 'Schools and Gender Diversity' has gone live. The Committee are upset and disappointed that another event featuring external guest speakers with a history of transphobia (1) will take place on our campus.

The event is advertised as a research seminar though there is no clarity from the event description what research will be presented e.g. published research referenced or acknowledgement of research in progress that is funded with ethical approval. Details of the proposed speakers can be found in the event description. We are of course interested to hear objective, fact-based, pedagogic research on how best to support young transgender people in our schools. However from what we understand of the work conducted by Transgender Trend (the organisation that one of the proposed speakers is the founder of), they produced guidance for schools in England and Wales which has been resolutely denounced by Stonewall, stating, "It is a deeply damaging document, packed with factually inaccurate content"(2). We are concerned that the speakers at this event will provide a biased viewpoint on supporting schoolchildren. Challenges to these views will most

likely have to come from the audience, or be posed by the chair of the event.

University senior management invited us to meet with a view to establishing ways in which to reduce the harmful impact of this event on the trans and non-binary community here at the University. They informed us that while the University does not necessarily endorse the views of the speakers at this event, it is however permitted given the University's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression. They have indicated that they want to work with SPN, EUSA and PrideSoc student network to support trans and non-binary staff and students at this difficult time. Nonetheless we have made it clear that, without a statement to the opposite, the University will be seen as endorsing this event simply by hosting it on University premises and that the Staff Pride Network sees no way to make the event not harmful. We will continue to support staff and students with informative, unbiased events.

The event organiser has told the media that the SPN were invited to participate in this research seminar. In fact, they invited us to participate in an earlier version of this event, an 'in conversation with' event on this topic which was proposed as a balanced discussion. We understand LGBT Youth Scotland and Scottish Trans Alliance were also invited to that event and that they declined to participate because they would not share a platform with speakers who do not accept trans identities as valid, putting at risk the health and wellbeing of their staff. We agree with this stance and declined to participate in any event with these speakers. The SPN believes that an event cannot be respectful when the very foundation of that event is predicated on the denial that trans identities are valid.

We met with the secretary to the University compliance committee and they advised us that without balance the 'in conversation with' event, which was intended as a professional

development event, would not be approved. This research seminar approved by the compliance committee appears to be the same event, with the same speakers as the previous proposed event, but without balance. At no point were we invited to participate in the research seminar. Due to the refusal of the organiser to host a different event, we are at initial stages of planning an event to explore the imminent Scottish Government guidance, to counteract misinformation, to include speakers who affirm trans people's existence, not advocate the rolling back of hard-fought legal rights.

We believe that having external guest speakers with these beliefs at a University of Edinburgh sanctioned event contravenes the University's commitment to Dignity and Respect⁽³⁾ and Trans Equality⁽⁴⁾ and these external speakers should not be allowed this space.

It does not "create a positive culture for our trans and non-binary students and staff where they feel supported and respected to live as their true selves". Indeed, staff and students have told us they are considering leaving the University – and have since resigned – due to management appearing to endorse speakers such as these.

Kind regards,
Staff Pride Network Committee

1 We believe it is correct to say that the activity of the proposed external guest speakers constitutes a history of transphobia because they have publicly and repeatedly misgendered and dead named trans people, and cited trans identities as equivalent to pathology (something that is simply not the case). The work of the proposed external guest speakers encourages schools to deny trans children the right to self-identify and recommends trans children be discouraged from living as their true selves.

2 <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/node/62946>

3

http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/HumanResources/Policies/Dignity_and_Respect-Policy.pdf

4

https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/trans_equality_policy.pdf

UPDATE

From event organisers via Eventbrite:

"We are sorry to inform you that the research seminar on Schools and Gender Diversity has had to be postponed. We aim to re-schedule the seminar early next year."

The Staff Pride Network Committee are relieved the event is not going ahead at this time and we are working with the University to provide a safe, inclusive environment for ALL staff and students to work and study.