

# Queen of Ireland, Panti Bliss reflection on World AIDS Day

My eyes popped out of my head and I couldn't hold back an excited grin sitting at my desk. HIV Scotland were asking if the Staff Pride Network would be interested in hosting a World AIDS Day Q&A with Panti Bliss! Panti Bliss! She who successfully campaigned for Equal Marriage in the Republic of Ireland, delivered an emotional TED talk on LGBT+ equality "All the little things", whose speech in the national theatre of Ireland has been viewed on YouTube almost 1 MILLION times, and owns Pantibar in Dublin's gay scene! I've been there many years ago and I cherished the memory as the closest I've been to this Irish activist icon.

On Saturday 30th November we welcomed staff, students and the local community to join Rory O'Neill aka Panti at Old College's Usha Kacera Lecture Theatre. He has been openly HIV positive for many years and HIV Scotland's CEO Nathan Sparling discussed with Rory about his upbringing, the creation of Panti Bliss and about using his visibility to combat HIV stigma. He shared memories of a rural childhood, the birth of Panti Bliss in Japan and how his HIV medication has changed from 38 tablets per day when diagnosed, to just 1 today, and no longer any side-effects. Rory talked about how HIV is not the killer it once was: taking the tablet makes the virus so diminished in the bloodstream that it is undetectable and multiple research studies have shown that makes it untransmittable. U = U (undetectable = untransmittable). He highlighted the simple facts that people aren't dying any more so there aren't ads on TV and support services are less funded.

Questions were asked, Rory/Panti was sincere, genuine, funny, relatable, personal, everything I expected and more. We are delighted that the event raised £253 for HIV Scotland, who

recently launched their #ZEROHIV strategic plan for Scotland to reach zero new HIV transmissions, zero HIV-related deaths and zero HIV-related stigma by 2030.

As a mark of solidarity for World AIDS Day, we collaborated with the University Estates team and obtained funding from the University Secretary's Group to light up McEwan Hall, Appleton Tower and New College in red. Check out our Tweet if you missed seeing them for yourself.

Jonathan MacBride

HIV Scotland – learn about the work they do and how you can get involved

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## **Celebrating Bi Visibility**

I was really pleased to have my first public-facing engagement as newly elected Co-Chair and Bi Rep of the Staff Pride Network as being part of a panel discussion about bi visibility for Bi Visibility Day on 23 September 2019. It was an opportunity for the panellists (myself, Ellen Blair (Bisexual and Pansexual Officer from Pride Soc), Elliot Byrom (EUSA Trans and Non-Binary Officer), Lorna (one of the founders from the Scottish Bi+ Network) and Ellen Desmond (one of the editors from Monstrous Regiment – publishers of 'The Bi-ble')) to speak about our personal perspectives on bi-visibility and our identities as bisexual people. This was followed by questions from the audience.

There was discussion on being out at work, assumptions that are made about your identity depending on whether you're in a relationship with someone of the same gender 'Oh you must be gay' or with someone of the opposite gender 'So, you're

straight now?'. There is so much erasure of bisexual identities from both the straight and the queer communities.

It was a truly refreshing experience to be able to speak so freely and openly, very rewarding and empowering. The room was really engaged in the discussion and I hope that everyone involved got at least as much as I did out of the experience.

Katie Nicoll Baines

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# 50 Years After Stonewall

## Marking the milestone event

This year saw the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots – the events following a police raid on the Stonewall bar in New York City in 1969 which are today seen as a turning point in LGBT+ history. The University of Edinburgh and the Staff Pride Network at the University marked this milestone with a week-long series of events at the beginning of the academic year. The ‘Stonewall week’ was organised by SPN Member Dr Paul Behrens, a Reader in Law, with the help of Sean Becker and Alexander Wolffenbüttel (research assistants at UoE) and members of the SPN and allies who helped at the individual events. At the beginning of the week stood a reception at the Scottish Parliament on 10 September 2019, at which Nicola Sturgeon (First Minister of Scotland) and Sir Stephen Wall (former Permanent Representative of the UK to the European Union and chair of Kaleidoscope Trust) gave keynote speeches. The reception was introduced by Patrick Harvie MSP (Co-Convenor of the Scottish Green party and Co-Chair and Co-Convenor of the LGBTI+ cross-party group at the Scottish Parliament), who was also the Parliamentary Sponsor for this

event. On the following day, the University raised the Rainbow flag at Old College, the Bi flag at the Old Medical School and the Trans flag at New College in support of the events.

## **Stonewall conference**

Thursday and Friday were dedicated to a multidisciplinary conference on '50 Years After Stonewall', which took place at the Playfair Library and in St Cecilia's Hall. In the course of that conference, scholars from a large range of universities, activists from Nigeria and from Uganda, diplomats and leaders of religious communities gave presentations which explored the progress of the LGBT+ community in the last half century and the remaining challenges from the perspectives of law, medicine, politics, education, Scottish society and Scots law, but also from the views of African and Asian countries and the Arab peninsula. A particular highlight was a paper given by Jason Chien, Director-General, Taipei Representative Office in the UK, Edinburgh Office, who spoke about the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan – the first Asian country to take that step. A longer session on the second conference day was dedicated to religion and the LGBT+ community, concluding with a roundtable with representatives from Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

## **Supporters and funders**

The Stonewall week met with considerable support within the university and was made possible through donations by the Law School, the Edinburgh Centre for International and Global Law, the Principal's Fund, the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and the Department for Social Responsibility and Sustainability.

## Reflection

Reflecting on the conference, Dr Behrens said:

*We are immensely grateful to all our sponsors and to everybody who contributed to the conference. Stonewall laid the groundwork for great achievements, including the recognition of gay rights in many Western States. But there is a danger of getting complacent. The experts at our conference have shown us that it is still a long journey to full equality. Gay and transgender asylum seekers still face prejudice within the immigration system. Homeless LGBT people are among the most vulnerable members of society, and there are still countries where gay people face the death penalty. But there is light as well. The legalisation of gay marriage in Taiwan and the recent judgment in Botswana against anti-gay laws demonstrate that progress is made even in parts of the world that tend to be socially conservative. These are beacons of hope. We may only see the beginnings of change, but its consequences will be felt around the world.*

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## Feedback from Network of Network Higher Education LGBT+ event

I had a whirlwind, there-and-back-in-a day, trip to Milton Keynes for the Network of Network in Higher Education event on the 8th of October. It was brilliant to meet representatives from other HE institutions and learn how their LGBT+ networks

operate and are recognised and supported (or not in many cases) by their institutions.

There were talks on trans inclusion in HE, centring around the experience of an academic from Oxford University, highlighting how traditions often result in inequality. We heard from the Birmingham network about their involvement in helping to support LGBT+ staff in the setting up of their Dubai campus, of particular relevance on that date given that it was International Lesbian Visibility Day. I think living in a country that largely has quite progressive attitudes (with much obvious progress still to make) towards LGBT+ identities many of us often forget that there are many parts of the world that are not safe for LGBT+ people.

The day culminated with the Manchester University LGBT+ network sharing how far they have come in the past 10 years, it was brilliant to see the evolution of their network over time. I was left inspired and emboldened that our network here in Edinburgh has much to contribute to the wider community of networks as well as a lot of expertise through our lived experiences that are hugely valuable to the university community.

Katie Nicoll Baines

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## **SPN Book Group**

The SPN Book Group meets once a month after work (usually on the third Thursday) to discuss a book over a drink or cup of tea. We select books based on member suggestions and have read books from all genres, from sci-fi to self-help and from philosophy to high fantasy, with and without LGBTQ+ content.

Our next meeting will be Thursday 16th January, 17:45-19:00 (venue TBC). We'll be discussing 'Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl' by Andrea Lawlor. All are welcome to attend.

For more information please see our SharePoint folder or e-mail Anna on [anna.smith@ed.ac.uk](mailto:anna.smith@ed.ac.uk).

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## SPN Merchandise

Hello all! My name is Cathy and I am your new merchandise co-ordinator.

I started working at the University of Edinburgh in February 2019. At first, I was nervous about becoming a member of the Staff Pride Network, as I hadn't had the opportunity to engage openly with other LGBT+ community networks in previous workplaces as a straight-passing bisexual. Thankfully, I was put at ease when I attended the network's AGM in September 2019 and had the chance to meet so many welcoming and helpful members. I decided I wanted to take on a more active role within the Staff Pride Network by volunteering some of my time to help with the smooth running of things.

As your merchandise co-ordinator, I am a central point of contact for any Staff Pride Network members seeking to acquire some lovely SPN merch. This includes our classic rainbow lanyards, LGBT+ Ally rainbow lanyards, SPN posters, business cards and some environmentally-conscious recycled pens.

or send me an email: [cathy.naughton@ed.ac.uk](mailto:cathy.naughton@ed.ac.uk).

Cathy Naughton