

Introduction

Welcome to the third issue of **Forum News**, which is published regularly by the **Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equality in Post-School Education** ("the Forum"). This newsletter aims to provide updates on the work of the Forum and on sexual orientation and trans equality in post-school education, including news features, forthcoming events and useful publications.

Feedback from our first National Conference

The Forum held its first national conference on sexual orientation and gender identity equality on 24 March in Birmingham. Over 40 delegates attended the event, representing both learners and staff from colleges and universities across the UK, and we would like to thank them all for some thought provoking discussion about how to promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality within the post-school education sector.

At the start of the event, the Forum launched its "twelve steps to tackling discrimination and promoting equality" - a checklist to facilitate sexual orientation and gender identity equality for both learners and staff. Delegates also heard about the resources currently available to the sector, including the 'Visible and Valued' training DVD toolkit and the Forum's own publication: "Guidance on trans equality in post-school education". The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) reported on its survey findings on the experiences of LGBT people in higher education (see page 2 for further details of this research). Practical workshops followed, offering guidance and support on getting the best out of these resources.

Seth Atkin, Chair of the Forum said, *"Equality is not something that happens on the sidelines; it is something that is core to the policies and practices of every organisation. The Forum's first conference was a resounding success with many practical ideas shared in presentations and in discussions between delegates. It provides a firm foundation from which to develop more sexual orientation and gender identity equality work, including what will hopefully become an annual conference event"*.

Newham College of FE is one of Stonewall Top 100 Employers 2009

Stonewall, the LGB rights group, publishes its Top 100 Employers annually as part of its Workplace Equality Index. AoC is pleased to report that Newham College of Further Education was placed in the Top 100 Employers this year and was the leading educational institution in the country of all schools, colleges and universities. The College achieved a rank of 39, which was higher than some of the large corporate employers in the UK.

The Index aims to provide a national benchmark that showcases 'top employers' for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff in the UK. The research is survey and evidence based and requires employers who participate to demonstrate a public commitment to LGB employees, customers and service users; a willingness to change to ensure LGB employees and learners feel safe and valued and look to the organisation as a service provider of choice. Staff are also involved in giving feedback during the survey, giving their views of the employer and their day-to-day experiences.

Newham College has an active LGB Employee Advisory Group and it hosted a staff event in February 2009 as part of its LGBT History Month activities. Ben Summerskill, CEO of Stonewall, gave an informative and interesting address at the event prior to answering questions from staff. Those in attendance commented that they enjoyed the event and found it increased their knowledge.

Clive Ansell is part of the College's Senior Management team and an active member of the LGB Employee Advisory Group. *"I am proud that Newham has been ranked at 39 in the Stonewall Top 100 employers,"* he comments, *"and that we're the only educational institution to be listed this year. It's a fantastic achievement and reflects all the hard work and importance that the College has attached to LGB issues."*

(article continues on page 2)



Newham College of Further Education

We want to build on this success and ensure we are an employer of choice, as well as a first choice for people looking to study in the east London area."

One openly gay student, Mark Fraser, says that his sexuality has never been an issue at the College. "Some of my friends at other Colleges say they feel invisible in their classes or are bullied quite badly," reveals Mark. "We're all aware how pointless, cruel and narrow-minded this kind of behaviour is, so I'm just so glad I can say that I've honestly never felt like that. It's clear the College's equality policies and anti-homophobic stance really makes an impact on us students."

Training and events

- **AoC Training: Equality Impact Assessment Workshops - June 2009** – these workshops have been developed for Colleges and provide information, guidance and advice on carrying out impact assessments in accordance with the equality duties and good practice. Visit www.eventsforce.net/ia09 for details and booking information.
- **NUS Training: Understanding and Supporting Liberation – 17 July 2009** - training for sabbatical officers and other student executive members who either have a role in supporting liberation campaigns in their union or who want to understand how equalities affect all executive positions: <http://www.officeronline.co.uk//events/nationalevents/276366.aspx>
- **UNISON LGBT Members Conference – 20-22 November 2009, Cardiff** - all details at <http://www.unison.org.uk/conference/out2009.asp> or email: out@unison.co.uk

Useful publications

- **UNISON factsheets** - updated factsheets now available on: LGB workers rights; Transgender workers rights; and Monitoring LGBT workers. Email out@unison.co.uk for hard copies or download from: http://www.unison.org.uk/out/docs_list_wpr.asp
- **Out in UNISON** - Summer 2009 issue of LGBT members magazine *Out in UNISON* includes briefing on Equality Bill, preparing for UNISON LGBT conference, human rights, and LGBT and faith issues. Download at www.unison.org.uk/out
- **Research** - ECU has released an authoritative evidence base of the experiences of over 4000 lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans staff and students in higher education. The report shows unequivocally that while higher education institutions provide a very positive space for many LGBT students, there is a real need for the sector to engage with this equality area and review how it provides support for, and addresses discrimination against, LGBT staff and students. The research can be accessed here: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/lgbt-staff-and-students-in-he>



ECU will produce guidance in Autumn 2009 to help institutions tackle these issues. If you can contribute examples of good practice that your institution undertakes to advance LGBT equality, please contact Chris Hall at ECU – tel: 020 7438 1025, email: chris.hall@ecu.ac.uk

Forum contacts and further information

The **Chair of the Forum** is Seth Atkin, UCU (satkin@ucu.org.uk). **Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)** provides secretariat and financial support to the Forum. For further information about the Forum's work please contact the Equality and Diversity team at LLUK at: equalityanddiversity@lluk.org or visit www.lluk.org/3487.

Forum News is published by:

The Forum for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Equality in Post-School Education