

Campaigns

University Support for LGBTQ Students

By working together with the Counselling and Guidance Service, we have been able to present LGBTQ students with information about support services for LGBTQ students; in particular, the 'coming out, moving out' support groups that took place on a weekly basis during February. We also aided with the trialling and later advertising of the Q-chat online confidential support service for LGBTQ students. The senior counsellor praised our efforts this year in establishing the strongest beneficial working relationship between C&G and the LGBTQ.

We have also enjoyed a highly successful relationship with Equality and Diversity this year. In addition to support with other campaigns detailed below, the University has successfully implemented a Trans Support and Guidance Policy for the benefit of all trans and otherwise queer students at the University of Birmingham.

The LGBTQ Officer also took part in a steering group – consisting of representatives from Student and Staff E&D, Counselling and Guidance and the Alumni Office – to develop of the newly launched Staff LGBTQI network. Until the beginning of March 2010, Birmingham was the largest UK University without an LGBT* group within its staff union. Our contribution to the development of this group has been appreciated by all involved parties, and a continued relationship is highly conducive to improving the representation and experience of the larger LGBTQ* community here at Birmingham.

Campaigns

"Give Blood Because We Can't" – this year, the Vice-President Welfare decided that the issue of the National Blood Service ban – that had been in effect since summer 2005 – would be revisited. Given the revocation of this ban and the return of the NBS to Freshers' fair and the two blood donation drives that took place this year, we campaigned for all students at the University to give blood where able, but also to support the national 'Donation Not Discrimination' campaign to revoke the lifetime ban on gay/bisexual men giving blood. We set up a stall by the blood van on Friday, 25th September, 2009 to hand out information on the NBS blood donation centres AND the ban. In just a few short hours we collected over 300 signatures on the petition, which were sent to the NBS. As a national review on this blood ban was initiated in October – with strong hints that this policy would change significantly – this campaign has since become one of awareness for our members.

LGBT[Q] Housing – last summer, the University piloted a scheme to allow prospective students applying for accommodation to choose an 'LGBT' flat wherein they would feel more comfortable. The proposal was somewhat immature and received poor response in any case, so it never took effect. Working with the Vice-Presidents of Welfare and Housing/Community, University Equality and Diversity and the Guild's new SHAC service, we expanded on this proposal and developed a facility for all LGBTQ students (not just first years) to specify such a preference without necessarily creating segregated flats/houses with exclusively LGBTQ students – which would harm our long term goal of normalising different sexualities.

Coalition West Midlands – the ‘Joint Students Union Network’ founded by our LGBTQ Officer and representatives from eight other institutions sadly didn’t last long due to unavailability, although we have kept in touch with Bradford, Stafford, BCU and Surrey, so it’s not all bad. J

Although a national LGBT student proved difficult to implement, there was nothing stopping us from building a more local one. Coalition is nothing new, but had become stagnant late last academic year. This year, the LGBTQ Officer, Chair and Committee made a huge effort to contact representatives from Midlands Universities to build friendly relationships and ultimately redevelop a strong and collaborative Coalition. We have been highly successful in that respect; our relationship with Coventry and Warwick Universities is stronger than it has been in years; we have rebuilt our relationship with BCU and Aston, and we have introduced Wolverhampton, Gloucestershire and Leicester. Coalition’s major success this year was a joint History Month culminating in the fourth annual Homophobia is Gay barcrawl. We hope to have many more successes with Coalition in the near and distant future.

Working with ‘gay-friendly’ groups – we all recognise that sexuality does not define personality and that the LGBTQ community is far more diverse than the [sadly] popular gay stereotypes would indicate. As such, we’ve worked very closely with the Chaplaincy, Methodist, Anglican and Jewish Societies towards addressing the issue of faith and sexuality and smashing through the ‘religion vs. the gays’ notion. We have also built up a good relationship with RockSoc, MetalSoc, BandSoc, Sci-fi Soc and FetSoc, advertised some of their events to our members and even encouraged them to join us on mooches to these events.

Careers and Employability – an ongoing awareness and information campaign. The LGBTQ Officer and Chair took part in the ‘Peak Performance’ event organised by an LGBTQ-centred employer coalition in November 2009. At this event we collected as many leaflets as humanly possible and have made them available in the LGBTQ room. During the third term, a representative from the new staff LGBTQI will make a guest appearance at the coffee afternoon to discuss the issues faced by LGBTQ people in the workplace and how the LGBTQ community at-large can combat these issues.

Trans and Queer awareness – Trans and Queer issues are just as important as Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual issues, so we’ve worked to ensure that trans and queer students feel just as represented. While this has been an ongoing project, particular events such as our vigil for Transgendered Day of Remembrance and the History Month Trans & Queer workshop have been a great aid to achieving this goal.

Charity Events

World AIDS Day – on the 1st December, the Guild and the LGBTQ Association took part in a highly visible effort to raise awareness of HIV and AIDs, promote sexual health, and raise funds for the sexual health charity THT and HIV/AIDS support charity Crusaid. The VPW organised for a big red bus to travel around campus and halls of residence, while Guild/LGBTQ volunteers wandered around campus giving out condoms and fundraising. Overall, we raised a total of over £300 for this amazing cause.

St. Basil’s Charity Sleepout – six members of the LGBTQ association took part in this event, aimed at raising funds to combat homelessness, which many LGBTQ people are sadly subjected to after

'coming out'. We spent the night building – and living in – our homemade cardboard and plastic-sheet fortress amidst the pouring rain. The weather was bad but spirits were high; it was a lot of fun, it was for a good cause and bringing two epic Thermos flasks turned out to be a good shout. J

Visibility

Our presence in the University, the Guild and via various forms of online media has massively improved this year. The development of our new website – as well as the steps taken to update it regularly with current news, events and campaigns – has proven beneficial to new and existing members alike. Similarly, we have taken steps to maintain a strong presence on Facebook (via the group, fan page and events) and Twitter to project an active association working to the benefit of LGBTQ students at UoB. In conjunction with the mailing list, the Officer's blog and even just talking to students at our events, we have made ourselves very visible to LGBTQ students. Consequently we've have elicited a lot of new faces throughout the course of year.

Getting into current issues

Throughout the year we've been contacted by RedBrick to for interview (or to provide commentary) on a number of LGBTQ related articles; the National Blood Service, revisions to the Equalities Bill, modern perception of LGBTQ people and one or two others. We've also been heavily involved in current local/national/University issues such as the BNP on Question Time, Fight Against Fees FlashMob, Azzam Tamimi talk, Naked Day of Action against sweatshop. Our blogs also challenge controversial issues raised in the media such as the appalling BBC's 'Have Your Say' article title, and Pope's insinuations against homosexuals when speaking out against the equalities bill. These issues are relevant and important to LGBTQ students and it is essential that the Association makes its presence known.