

LGBTQ+ History Month

Why we have a history month



In the run up to this year's LGBTQ+ History month at the hospital we've had lots of people across the organisation excited to help and see what we create, and we've also heard a fair amount of "Oh I didn't know that was a thing" "What's that for?" "Why do you get a month?", and the answer can largely be summed up by one law: Section 28.

This article that you're reading now would have been illegal under Section 28.

Section 28 was group of laws introduced in 1988 which stated that a local authority "shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" or "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

In the late 1980s despite some great work and progress being made by a variety of lesbian and gay community organisations, labour unions and politicians, homophobic sentiment was at a peak. In 1987, the British Social Attitudes Survey found that 75% of people surveyed said homosexual activity was "always or mostly wrong". Much of this anti-gay sentiment was worsened by the AIDS crisis, with the belief that only gay or bisexual man carried and spread HIV still widespread, despite known medical evidence on the contrary.

With that widespread homophobia, and in response to pro-lesbian and gay literature distributed in some schools, as well as a few local authorities spending money to support gay and lesbian causes, a large movement had grown to prevent governments from "promoting" homosexuality.

The result was Section 28, and for over 20 years across the UK, teachers would feel unable to talk about anything related to LGBTQ+ issues in schools. This led to teachers being afraid to say anything that might out themselves, or feeling like they couldn't intervene in homophobic bullying. Sex education for LGBTQ+ people was out of the question. It's a legacy that still lingers on, with many teachers and parents feeling like openly LGBTQ+ teachers or topics don't belong in schools even now.

In the early 2000s in the UK we saw a slew of reforms and new laws coming in to protect and support LGBTQ+ people, including the standardisation of age of consent for sex across all genders, the Gender Recognition Act, civil partnerships and protection from homophobic discrimination by employers.

In Scotland, Section 28 was repealed in 2000, and following it, the rest of the UK in 2003. Schools Out, a UK charity formed by gay and lesbian teachers in 1974, celebrated the first LGBTQ+ History Month in 2005 (nationally it is LGBTQ+, while we at the MKUH Pride Network use LGBTQ+ and we'll talk about this later in the month!)

The motto of LGBTQ+ History Month is "Claiming our past. Celebrating our present. Creating our future." It aims to educate young people about our history, the issues we still face today, and to combat prejudice with education.

Since 2005 many groups have got involved with history month, widening the scope beyond just schools, with events all over the country in universities, museums, 10 Downing Street, and much more.

Here at MKUH the Pride Network wants to make sure everyone feels safe to be who they are. We want to be able to promote love, acceptance, tolerance and education, and be sure that if anyone has a question, they are supported in asking it. We celebrate the month now to make up for lost time, and to make sure that our history does not go forgotten.

Ending on a personal note, having come out in a Milton Keynes school in 2004, just one year after section 28's repeal, I vividly remember the air of danger and secrecy in the empty room as an obviously concerned teacher handed me a leaflet for a group called Q Space. I am grateful that she was able to do that, as I can confidently say that having access to that group changed my life. It was clear that she wasn't sure if what she was doing was going to get her in trouble or not, but I'm thankful that she did it anyway.

Q Space actually still exists now, as Q:Alliance, and they run a variety of services for LGBTQ+ adults and young people. If you'd like any more information on them, or on history month we have links below.

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Q:alliance