

Shadows of Section 28



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Hosted by LGBT Health and Wellbeing with Jordan Daly (TIE), Caitlin Wood (LGBTYS), Tracy Pearson (community member), Tim Puntis (community member and retired teacher), and Maruska Greenwood (Chief Executive of LGBT Health and Wellbeing).

Event date: Wednesday 19 February 2020

Event location: Quaker Meeting House, Edinburgh

www.lgbthealth.org.uk

THE EVENT

LGBT Health and Wellbeing host quarterly discussion events as part of their community programme. As we approach the 20th anniversary of the repeal of Section 28 in Scotland, this intergenerational community discussion was an opportunity to reflect on life under Section 28, to draw parallels to present issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community and to discuss how we may heal and move forward together. There was a panel discussion with TIE (Time for Inclusive Education) and LGBTYS (LGBT Youth Scotland), and a presentation by community member Tracy Pearson. Members of the community were invited to ask questions and were given the opportunity to share their stories in the form of small group discussions.



COMMUNITY RESPONSE

- » Although Section 28 was repealed in Scotland 20 years ago, there is still censorship in schools around LGBTQ+ issues.
- » An LGBTI-inclusive curriculum is a positive step forward, but it is important that we hold schools and the government accountable and do not become complacent.
- » The rhetoric around the proposed Gender Recognition Reform in Scotland is similar to the rhetoric around Section 28.
- » We need to work together as a community, particularly to support our trans members.
- » We should create mini-communities within the larger LGBTQ+ community and enact positive change in our own circles.

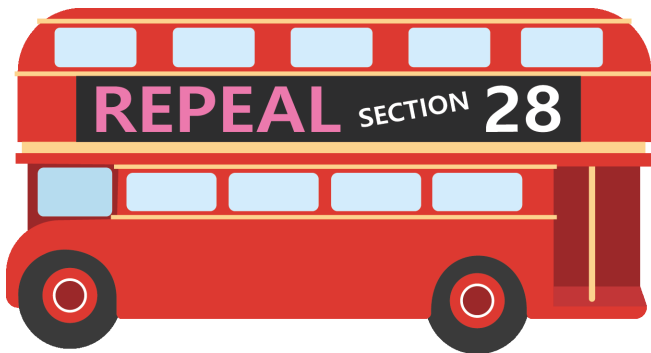
IMPACT

This intergenerational event was a part of community healing. People who lived through Section 28 had an opportunity for their voice to be heard as they shared personal experiences in a supportive environment, while people who did not experience Section 28 were able to learn from their community about an important part of our shared history. The audience was also able to provide feedback and ask questions about the current state of LGBTQ+ awareness in Scottish schools.

WHAT WAS SECTION 28?

Scotland: 24 May 1988 - 21 June 2000
England and Wales: 24 May 1988 - 18 November 2003

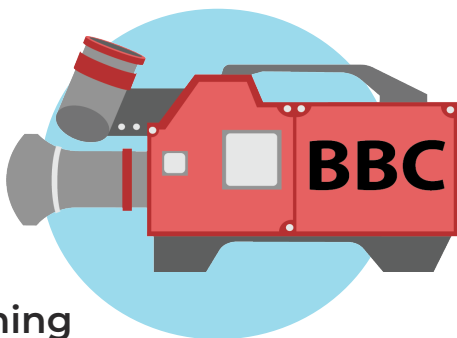
Section 28, known as Clause 2a in Scotland, was part of the Local Government Act 1988. It stated, "a local authority shall not: intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."



Before Section 28, attitudes were shifting, particularly in liberal circles, with legal changes, public figures identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community and queer culture in popular media.

LIFE UNDER SECTION 28

"[Section 28] crystalised prejudice under the guise of protecting children." - Maruska Greenwood, Chief Executive of LGBT Health and Wellbeing



Storming the BBC

23 May 1988, the evening before section 28 came into force, lesbian activists stormed the BBC during the Six O'Clock News.

1967 Homosexual acts between men are decriminalised by The Sexual Offences Act 1967.

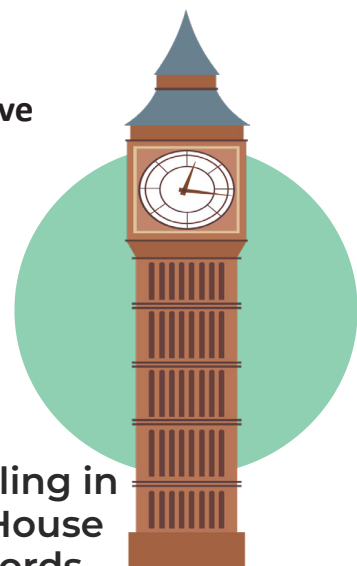
1972 The first British Gay Pride Rally is held in London. 1000 people march from Trafalgar Square to Hyde Park.

1980 Lionel Blue becomes the first openly gay British rabbi. *Gay Life*, the UK's first television series aimed at a gay audience, is broadcast on London Weekend Television. *A Change of Sex* airs on BBC2, following Julia Grant's social and medical journey as a transgender woman in the UK.

1984 Labour MP Chris Smith is the first openly gay politician in UK parliament.

1985 The Gay Black Group receives council funding for The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre in South London.

Despite these social advances, there was also a backlash felt throughout the LGBTQ+ community due to the mass hysteria caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.



Abseiling in the House of Lords

2 February 1988, a group of lesbian activists abseiled into the House of Lords after peers voted in favour of the bill.

The evening began with a presentation by Maruska Greenwood, Chief Executive of LGBT Health and Wellbeing, to provide context on the social and political atmosphere in the UK prior to and during Section 28.

- » Constraints put on councils with censorship of public schools, libraries, art spaces and theatres.
- » Lack of funding for LGBTQ+ groups.
- » Divisive bigotry both leading up to the implementation of Section 28 and its repeal, “a time of public vitriol [with a clear message that] you’re a threat to society, you don’t belong”.
- » A terrifying time with media, politicians, and religious organisations demonising the LGBTQ+ community but it left a legacy of resistance.
- » The queer community was reclaiming their own stories.
- » Brought together disparate people, men and women were working together for a common cause.
- » Direct action with demonstrations across the UK.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The following guiding questions provided an opportunity for community members to share their personal experiences through small group discussions. Below are some of their responses.

What was happening in your life around 1988 when the Section 28 clause was first introduced?

- » Memories of fear.
- » Media outlets were focused on what was happening in England. Very little news coverage about activities in Scotland.
- » Activism and direct action.
- » While the LGBTQ+ community was being silenced, there was a queer atmosphere in pop culture with celebrities like George Michael and Freddie Mercury.
- » Not born when Section 28 was introduced.

How do you feel Section 28 impacted you personally/professionally?

- » Lasting trauma caused by homophobia.
- » Despite Section 28 being repealed, several community members shared experiences where they were told, as recently as 2017, that LGBTQ+ issues could not be discussed in schools.
- » Too young to recall the impact of Section 28.

RIPPLES OF SECTION 28

“Section 28 was not just about homosexuality, but the whole LGBT community.” - Tracy Pearson, community member

Section 28 had a hugely negative impact on state schools, but the ripple effect of homophobia went beyond. Tracy, a former armed forces medic, shared her personal story of the effect of Section 28 on post-secondary education and the military, and her experience as a trans woman serving in the forces. She recounted how she was forced to hide her identity and the harassment that she experienced, serving weeks in military prison while under investigation. Tracy also spoke about the support and community within the military as she and her colleagues refused to “out-people”, and how a senior colleague instructed her team, “you as medics will treat everyone equally”.

A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

"The victims, in the end, were the LGBT children [...] they couldn't turn to anyone." - Tim Puntis, retired school teacher

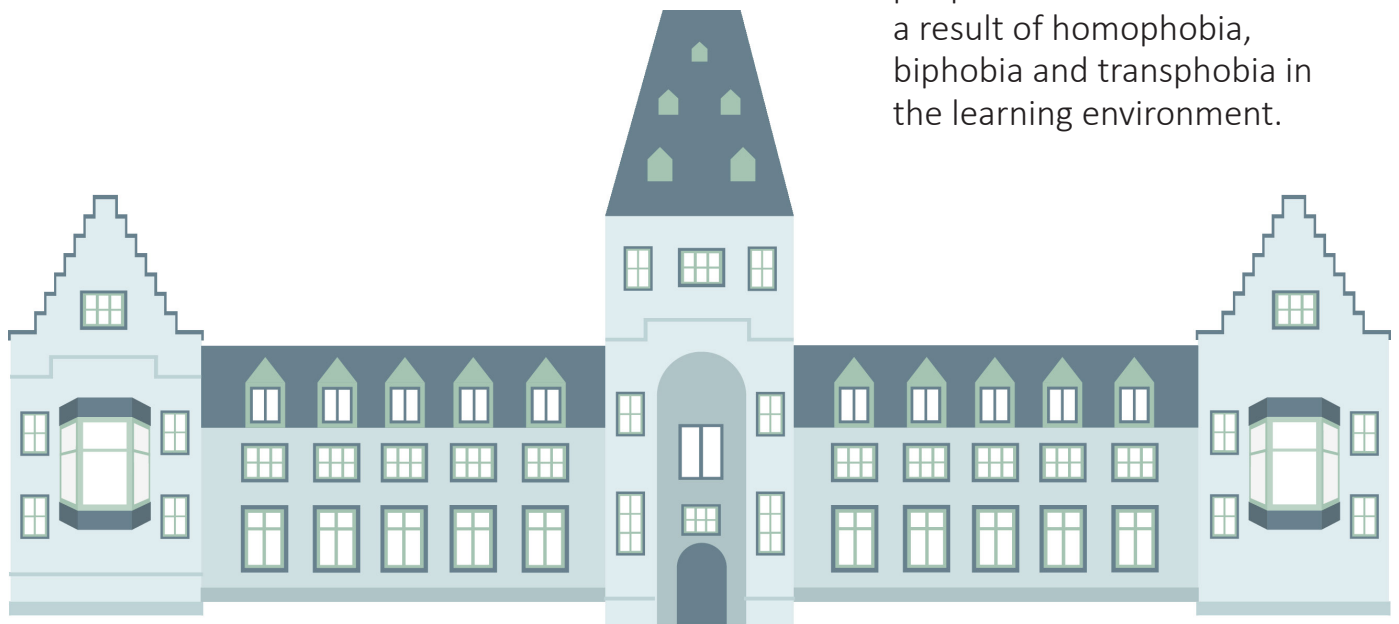
In addition to the panel, we also heard a first-hand account of the teaching experience under Section 28 through a pre-recorded interview with a retired school teacher, Tim Puntis. Puntis spoke about his experience working in Edinburgh state schools as a gay man during Section 28. According to Puntis, there was a lot of self-censorship in schools. The law was open to different interpretations and because it was never tested, school management interpreted it as strongly as possible to avoid becoming the test case. Puntis also spoke about the homophobia that was normalised by Section 28, stating that it was the worst that he had experienced since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act and that attitudes had been changing towards the LGBTQ+ community but Section 28 was a step backwards.



71% of LGBT young people experienced bullying in school on the grounds of being LGBT. A rise from 69% in 2012 and 60% in 2007.



9% of LGBT young people and 27% of transgender young people left education as a result of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the learning environment.



SCHOOL LIFE AFTER SECTION 28 - LGBTYS

In addition to the policy work by TIE (see the following page), Scottish youth are also supported through LGBTYS (LGBT Youth Scotland) and their LGBT Charter programme. Caitlin Wood, LGBTYS' Education Capacity Building Officer, spoke about LGBTYS' LGBT Schools Charter, a programme that involves training, policy reviews, and resources to ensure that schools are meeting legislative needs and that LGBTQ+ students are included in all aspects of the school experience. The program has proved very popular and there is currently a waiting list of schools to undergo the charter program, including primary schools.

EDUCATION AFTER SECTION 28 - TIE

In 2018, Scotland made history by becoming the first country in the world to mandate an LGBTI-inclusive curriculum across all state schools. This important step forward was accomplished through the work of TIE (Time for Inclusive Education), a Scottish charity founded in 2015 by Liam Stevenson and Jordan Daly with the aim to combat homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in schools through LGBT-inclusive education.

Daly recounted his own experiences of homophobia and the culture of silence around LGBTQ+ issues while at school, claiming that although he was at school post-Section 28, the discriminatory law might as well have been in place. This sentiment was echoed by other members of the community.

Daly noted the importance of young people learning about LGBTQ+ icons and learning the history of the community and what they have overcome, just as you would learn about other equal right movements, rather than focusing solely on sex and relationships. Daly also spoke about TIE's role in countering anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes at a pivotal age and ensuring that younger generations do not share the same negative experiences as those previous.

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Q: Are different family types being discussed in nursery (early years in Scotland)?

A: (Jordan) TIE works on two levels, national policy engagement, and a free school service. For younger groups, like primary, they focus on equality and diversity with LGBTQ+ people included in diverse families education. They teach simple concepts like respect, gender stereotypes, identifying bullying, and identifying biphobia, transphobia and homophobia. One of their methods is "humanising through experience" by introducing students to adult members of the LGBTQ+ community. There are early years educators on their panel.

A: (Caitlin) LGBTYS works with educators to help them be confident in supporting the LGBTQ+ community with a focus on intersectionality. They also crowdsource to better inform training, for example, they are currently building a list of inclusive books.

Q: Is there complacency, particularly within the government, because they appear to be doing well from the outside?

A: (Caitlin) Yes, there is complacency in schools and the government, but now is the important work. Social change is not linear and they must be held accountable. LGBTYS is not an advocacy organisation, rather they support young people to be advocates.

A: (Jordan) It is easy for the government to accept recommendations and achieve applause for it. The government now needs to fund it and ensure it is implemented properly. The 2018 announcement encouraged schools to get ahead of the 2021 implementation.

Q: With protests in England against LGBT-inclusive education, the focus has been on queer youth, but we want to ensure that children of LGBT parents are still supported.

A: (Jules) Their issues are unique and the number of children of LGBTQ+ parents is growing. We should look at examples of other organisations, like Rainbow families in Australia.

CONTEMPORARY PARALLELS

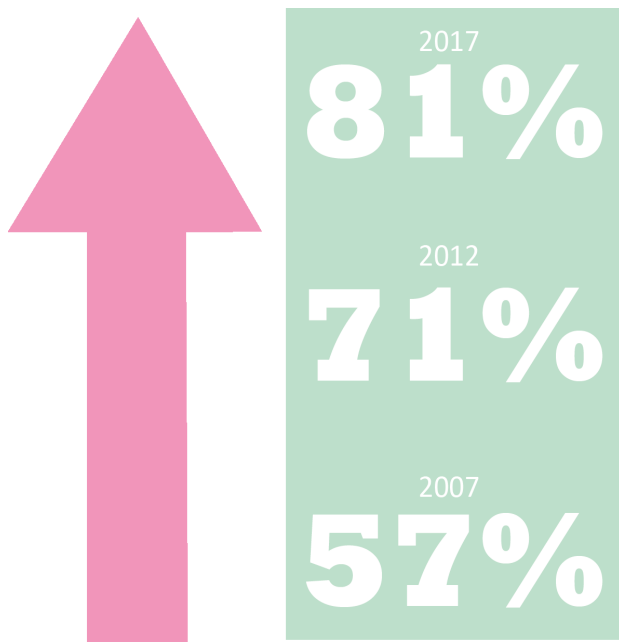
“The fact that we have a community is what matters most. When the community splinters is when we start to see shadows of discrimination again.” - Tracy Pearson, community member

Although the event was focused on Section 28, the parallels between Section 28 and the rhetoric surrounding the proposed Gender Recognition Reform in Scotland were evident. Community members expressed the concern that issues affecting transgender members of our community could become another Section 28. It was suggested that the best way to combat this is to be allies for trans people when they are not in the room and to educate people within our own community.



HOW CAN WE HEAL AND MOVE FORWARD?

The percentage of LGBT young people who think that Scotland is a good place to live has risen over the last decade:



COMMUNITY RESPONSE

“The community is about safe-spaces and loving people for who we are.” - community member

Below are suggestions from the community on how we can heal and move forward together:

- » Intergenerational events.
- » Individual action rather than relying on the same groups to organise and accomplish everything.
- » Acts of kindness to combat toxicity.
- » Create mini communities.
- » Different groups and organisations working together.
- » Support each other and our mental health, but start with yourself.
- » Get involved.
- » Less competing and more collaborating.
- » Groups like LGBT Health and Wellbeing, TIE and LGBTYS need to make themselves available to answer questions.

The event ended on a positive note with one community member sharing that their experience as a trans person had been largely positive. It is important for our own mental health to remember that there are many members of the LGBTQ+ community that have positive experiences and it is worth sharing them.

RESOURCES

LGBT Youth Scotland - www.lgbtyouth.org.uk
Time for Inclusive Education - www.tiecampaing.co.uk
Rainbow Families (Australia) - www.rainbowfamilies.com.au

Illustrations provided by YLWBKillustrations

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