Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

Pictured: The Northumbria University team working on the 'Out and About' project. (LR) Dr Antonio Portas, Frances Hamilton and Daria Onitiu.

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# New online tool to offer support for LGBT+ staff and students

**A team from Northumbria University, Newcastle are developing plans for an online platform that would help members of the LGBT+ community to understand their legal rights when they travel abroad.**

It is estimated that between 10% and 20% of all Higher Education staff at institutions across the UK identify as LGBT+.

The ‘Out and About in HE’ platform would offer legal advice in a user-friendly fashion for LGBT+ staff and students who travel internationally, and bring together information about LGBT+ rights around the globe.

The tool would allow users to navigate the LGBT+ legal landscape in different countries, helping them to plan ahead for travel outside of the UK. It would also bring together information about the homeland circumstances of LGBT+ colleagues who come into the UK, to improve awareness and understanding.

The idea for the hub came from a recent conference, hosted by Imperial College, London and attended by academics from universities across the UK, including from Northumbria University’s Faculty of Engineering and Environment.

Delegates were asked to consider some of the diversity challenges facing the STEM sector and come up with potential solutions. Team ideas were then pitched to a ‘Dragon’s Den’ style judging panel.

The ‘Out and About’ concept won its pitch, along with a prize of £1,000 from conference supporter Accenture to create a full bid to fund the project. Accenture have also donated an hour of consultancy time to assess the bid and make recommendations to improve its success.

The ‘Pride in STEM’ team behind the concept included Dr Antonio Portas from Northumbria University, alongside colleagues from Loughborough University, Manchester University, Oxford University, Queen Mary University, the Institute of Physics, Pride in STEM and HMRC.

Dr Portas explains: “Universities are truly international and diverse communities, and sometimes LGBT+ colleagues who have to travel abroad struggle to understand what their legal rights are.

“Our project is about creating a hub that colleagues could quickly navigate, to ensure they will be safe when travelling overseas. Often colleagues are working in international teams and they need to be confident that it is okay to be themselves both in the UK and abroad.”

Frances Hamilton, Senior Lecturer in Law at Northumbria Law School, is now

working with colleagues to progress the project. Frances, whose area of research specialism is LGBT cross-border rights, is also Co-Convenor for the 'Gender, Sexuality and the Law' Research Interest Group at Northumbria University. She has appointed PhD student Daria Onitiu to assist in researching and preparing the initial bid.

Frances said: "At the moment, there isn't one single place which brings together information about the current legal landscape of LGBT+ rights across the globe, so the plan is to develop a website where we could curate the current legal landscape of LGBT+ rights in different countries."

The 'Pride in STEM' team who pitched the original idea consisted of Antonio Portas (Northumbria University), Eugenie Hunsicker (Loughborough University), Emma Nichols (Manchester University), Clara Barker (Oxford University), Sarah Cosgriff (Institute of Physics), Alfredo Carpineti (Pride in Stem), Henry Li (Queen Mary University) and Shkeel Khan (HMRC)

The team are hoping to raise funding to cover the costs of staff time to fully progress the project, including a postdoctoral researcher.

Northumbria University is a multi-cultural community which values diversity and aims to embed equality and diversity into everything it does.

The University recently launched its LGBTQ* Network, which is a fully inclusive community for staff and postgraduate researchers. The group supports and welcomes all staff at the University who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Non Binary, and other sexualities and gender minorities, as well as any staff members who may wish to support their LGBTQ+ colleagues.

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