

Pride 2023

How far have we come?

As this year's annual LGBTQ+ celebration begins, we talk to six BALANCE members about their experiences in life and work



As Pride celebrations kick off all over the world this month, six members of BALANCE, the Institute's LGBTQ+ Allies network group, tell us about their experiences and what employers can do to support true equality.



Eimer Proctor
Senior Manager

When I first came out, Pride felt like a celebration and a safe space to be myself. Over the years, I've come to appreciate that this is not always possible, but I respect the path that has been forged by others to get us where we are today.

During Pride 2023, I will remember those who lost their lives and stand in solidarity with my LGBTQ+ community around the world who still face persecution and continue to fight for their right to be who they are.

It's eight years since Ireland achieved marriage equality, and yet it was only in January 2020 that the law in Northern Ireland finally caught up. Given our current political situation in Northern Ireland, it's unlikely that we will see any further advancements in LGBTQ+ rights and equality in the near future.

I find this very concerning given the rise in hate crimes, conversion therapy and anti-trans rhetoric in the media. It is up to everyone to help end discrimination for the LGBTQ+ community and promote equality.

There has been some great progress in recent years concerning diversity and inclusion in the workplace, but there is still work to be done to protect LGBTQ+ employees and at the heart of this is education.

Employers can introduce diversity and inclusion policies and practices, for example appoint diversity champions and work with employees to help them understand the appropriate language they should use in the workspace.

Liaising with employees in the LGBTQ+ community and their allies is vital to understanding the obstacles the members of this community face every day. This, in turn, facilitates a greater understanding of how and why diversity and inclusion policies can directly impact business.

Those employees will, in time, become more comfortable to be themselves within their workplace, as they navigate the corporate world with the full support of their employer. Having these policies in place will also help to attract talented candidates, who will be carefully considering organisations with a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.



Conor Hudson
Finance Director

It's a general perception that Pride means 'celebration' and 'party'. And, yes, this is a part of Pride – a platform to be yourself and express yourself, but still people are also joining Pride to 'protest' and it is important to remember that Pride

started as a protest.

Equality for LGBTQ+ colleagues in the workplace isn't about sticking up a rainbow flag at the start of June.

Last year, in my organisation, a colleague and I launched an LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group (ERG) with the intention of discussing Pride. While the initial reaction was positive, one response we received was, "We support LGBTQ+ rights; why do we still need to talk about Pride?" This remark justified why we needed an ERG – to increase visibility and offer a safe space to LGBTQ+ colleagues and colleagues with LGBTQ+ family.

It is important for employees to feel part of an open and inclusive workplace from day one and allyship helps support this.

OVERCOMING PREJUDICE AND FEAR

Despite the great strides we have made in fostering more inclusive workplaces in recent years, many in the LGBTQ+ community continue to experience prejudice and fear, *writes Dee France.*

One of the main realities we see among our younger members is that they find themselves forced back into the closet once they leave college and start working.

When they do come out in the workplace, some have reported being subjected to unconscious bias characterised by microaggressions and subtle discriminations.

Some report living in fear of being ridiculed or bullied while others report being sidelined from promotions or excluded from social events.

Not feeling psychologically safe to express your authentic self in the workplace can create untold challenges for many in the LGBTQ+ community.

Unsurprisingly, these challenges increase stress levels and anxiety, and impact greatly on self-esteem, productivity levels and engagement with working life.

One of our recent Thrive Wellbeing cases who reached out for support, disclosed that they were "living a half-life" because they had to hide their true identity in the workplace.

Allyship is the single most impactful active support both organisations and individuals can offer LGBTQ+ colleagues. Demonstrating and modelling inclusive behaviours from the top-down drives change and promotes increased tolerance.

Visible leadership action around allyship can start with recognising Pride in the month of June. However, it is important to remember that allyship needs to be a day-to-day activity if you want to build trust among your employees. This will send a clear message to all that LGBTQ+ employees are seen, valued, and supported in the organisation all-year round.

Or those in the LGBTQ+ community who are experiencing discriminations and difficulties at work, you are not alone. If you feel victimised, or discriminated against, you can share your experience with others. Reach out to your organisation's HR team for guidance and support.

If you are concerned about confidentiality, you can reach out to the Thrive Wellbeing Hub. Our expert team can offer listening support and can also refer you to a third-party counsellor if required. All our services are free and completely confidential.



Dee France is Wellbeing Lead at Chartered Accountants Ireland

One of the actions we have taken to demonstrate visible allyship is to create MS Teams backgrounds and badges to highlight that this person identifies as an ally. We have found these a useful tool during recruitment and first introductions.

Allyship and open workplaces not only positively impact LGBTQ+ colleagues but can also support colleagues with LGBTQ+ friends and family.

Creating safe spaces for allies is equally important. They can't be expected to know all the answers and they should be able to ask genuine questions without being judged. This culture not only creates open environments for LGBTQ+ colleagues, but also for other intersectional aspects of diversity.



Hugo Slevin
Head of Function

Pride is a great day for us as an LGBTQ+ community, along with our allies, to come together and show unity, and strengthen through open visibility. It is always around this time of year that we start hearing the same question, "Why do we

still have Pride?", but I think it remains such an important day as shown by events over the past 12 months.

First, we continue to witness attacks against our community members in ever-increasing numbers. Attacks across Europe are currently at a 10-year high and recent media coverage in Ireland has again brought this sharply into focus.

As a community, we should be able to feel safe in expressing and being who we are. Pride is very much our time to come together and have a platform to vocalise and display these concerns.

We have also witnessed attempts to control the narrative on gay rights across the globe. Of significant concern has been what appears to be a regressing of rights in parts of the US, where this downward trend seems set to continue.

Even in Ireland, we have seen attacks on libraries and the cancelling of drag events in the last 12 months. Pride is the time of year during which our voices can be heard, and we stand against deliberate attempts to silence our community.

Finally, Pride is fun! The streets of Dublin come alive – there is a real sense of occasion and happiness in the air. We get to walk the streets, dance and celebrate with our family, friends and co-workers.



Jonathan Totterdell
**Major Programmes,
Financial Services**

Pride in 2023 means a day of visibility and courage for both the progress we have made and the long path ahead for LGBTQ+ people around the world.

Recent events such as anti-LGBTQ+ Bills being passed in Florida and – closer to home, the rise of

the far right and their anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric – remind us that progress can be rolled back quickly, and it is imperative that those who live in relative safety can make some noise for those who can't, without fear of repercussions.

Over the past decade, I think we have seen some huge successes with gay marriage, a more open culture and a focus by corporates among Ireland to bring diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) to the C-suite. The financial services sector has been making really impressive strides.

While there is a business case for DE&I, and many studies have shown that it leads to improved return on investment, I would like to see corporates in Ireland mature on this front, continue to grow their social consciousness, and see DE&I as a positive without the need to prove its financial return.

Employers are expected to be 'all in' on DE&I in 2023, having the uncomfortable conversations that sometimes come with this topic, appointing champions and including DE&I as part of their leadership ethos.

Inclusion is key on the DE&I agenda. You can have a diverse workforce, but without active inclusion, you will be missing a vital ingredient.

One thing I practice is to try to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak up at meetings and contribute ideas and viewpoints to decision-making. When people feel comfortable, they will be able to communicate their ideas more effectively.



Padraig Kilkenny
Finance Manager

For me, Pride is first and foremost a celebration. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the struggles for equality, not only in our own country, but for LGBTQ+ people across the world.

There is no doubt that Ireland has made considerable progress in terms of LGBTQ+ rights and fostering greater equality in recent years. Landmark victories such as the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum and gender recognition legislation have increased visibility and acceptance across Irish society.

The Ireland of today reflects a society that embraces diversity and supports LGBTQ+ rights. This has never been more evident than at Chartered Accountants Ireland with initiatives such as the BALANCE network and, more generally, with its support for diversity and inclusivity initiatives.

Personally, I am fortunate that I have never felt discriminated against in the workplace, but this is not to say that discrimination does not exist. What I have found helpful in my career is having LGBTQ+ representation at senior levels of the organisation and feeling that I have support from my colleagues and leadership.

I think this support can come in many forms from the highest levels where diversity and inclusion form part of the organisation's strategy, values and by extension its culture, to more practical efforts, such as establishing and enforcing

inclusive policies that protect LGBTQ+ employees from discrimination in areas like recruitment, promotion and benefits.

Effective allyship is more than just having policies and strategies in place. It is about supporting and advocating for the rights, well-being and inclusion of LGBTQ+ employees.

Everyone should understand and challenge their own biases through education and listen to LGBTQ+ colleagues, valuing their experiences, and amplifying their voices and perspectives in discussions and decision-making processes.

Pride is a great marker in the calendar for employers to stop and reflect where they are on this journey to foster and support real equality across the board.



Aine Crotty
**Audit and Outsourcing
Manager**

As a leader of a team in my workplace, I believe in the power of people and the true potential that is inside each and every one of my colleagues regardless of their gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.

Therefore, being an ally to my LGBTQ+ colleagues is important to me because it supports them in reaching their full potential.

Non-LGBTQ+ professionals need to be aware of their actions and any potential bias they might have – without the awareness, there cannot be any action or change.

I would recommend attending events such as those organised by BALANCE so you can become aware of the issues your LGBTQ+ colleagues are facing.

There are also some fantastic resources and training out there about unconscious bias that will enable you to change the language you use or how you perceive and treat your colleagues.

After awareness comes accountability. As a non-LGBTQ+ professional, hold yourself accountable to making your work environment a more inclusive place for your colleagues. Make a commitment to yourself and others to change how you act with your LGBTQ+ colleagues for the better.

Become an ally and be open and proud of that fact. Letting your colleagues know that you are an ally, and that you fully support them, can make them feel more comfortable in the workplace and allow them to speak more freely about any issues or discrimination they might be facing.

It is widely known and accepted that culture comes from the tone at the top. Leaders, whether it be partners or senior executive management team members, need to bring DE&I to the forefront of their agenda.

They need to live and breathe what they believe in and what they are trying to achieve for their employees. They need to lead by example and visibly demonstrate their belief in equality for all.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Committing to creating a workplace that welcomes everyone will ensure fair progression for all, writes *Kate Butler*. Here are some steps employers can take to help create a culture that truly supports diversity, equity and inclusion.

1 Create a framework

For any company starting off, a framework is essential. This can help to determine where you are on your journey, what support you need to mobilise and also to track progress. Ideally, the framework should include an employee resource network, DE&I targets, a strategy to support these targets, a ringfenced budget and governance structures to measure and report the targets.

2 Utilise diversity data

As you consider all aspects of DE&I (e.g. LGBTQ+ gender, ethnicity, etc.), think about the data you have and what additional data you could seek out – recruitment data you can use to compare the funnel experience for all candidates, for example.

3 Colleague experience

To truly understand the lived experience of all colleagues, including our LGBTQ+ community, we include a DE&I demographics monitoring screen as part of our regular colleague engagement survey. This allows us to understand how our LGBTQ+ colleagues feel about our organisation. Monitor progress on sentiment and tailor any interventions as needed.

4 Establish employee resource groups

We have six employee resource groups that embed the voice of our colleagues in DE&I, including our WithPride network. This network drives awareness, education and grassroots visibility on key cultural dates. Members also collaborate and lend their perspective on relevant policy or process change (e.g. the introduction of all-gender bathrooms and the roll-out of our Transitioning at Work policy).

5 Invest in learning

It is important to support colleagues, people managers and hiring managers in creating inclusive and diverse workplaces. We have developed mandatory DE&I training for all colleagues, and all of our hiring managers undertake inclusive hiring training at the outset.



**Kate Butler is Inclusion and Diversity
Lead at Bank of Ireland**