**STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 9.00 AM THURSDAY 10th APRIL 2025**

***“I was told they didn't want poofs working for them”*: Report exposes entrenched workplace homophobia in the UK**

* *New report finds 85% of LGBTQ+ professionals encounter career obstacles due to their identity*
* *More than a third of LGBTQ+ adults claim their identity negatively influenced their education*
* *80% of LGBTQ+ professionals state their identity influences where they choose to live*

A landmark report has laid bare the extent of homophobia in UK workplaces, revealing the significant barriers faced by LGBTQ+ professionals at every stage of their careers.

The study, which surveyed over 1,000 LGBTQ+ professionals, found that 85% have encountered career obstacles due to their identity. These ranged from discrimination in promotions and a lack of LGBTQ+ representation in leadership, to even verbal and physical attacks at work.

The challenges only intensified as careers progressed, with a one in four LGBTQ+ business owners or entrepreneurs reporting experiences of workplace abuse.

**UK schools undermine confidence in LGBTQ+ youth**

According to the findings, discrimination doesn’t start in the workplace. More than a third (34%) of respondents said their LGBTQ+ identity negatively impacted their education, with some recalling being encouraged to suppress their sexuality.

One respondent, who was bullied for being gay, said: “*I was told I had brought it on myself for drawing attention and that I should focus more on blending in like the others boys and not trying to make everything about me. As a result I drew into myself - directly impacting on schooling, social development etc as the bullying didn't stop but me talking about it did.”*

This is far from a historical issue. Ongoing political debates in the UK and US continue to restrict discussions of LGBTQ+ identities in schools and government resources, fostering a culture where many feel compelled to conceal their identity from an early age.

**Pressure to ‘be less gay’ constraining career choices**

More than half (56%) of respondents said their LGBTQ+ identity influenced their career choices, steering them away from certain industries, roles or locations due to fears of discrimination or lack of support.

One in six (16%) believed they had been denied job opportunities because of their identity. One respondent recalled: *"In a job interview, I was told they didn't want poofs working for them."* Another described how a company director changed their stance upon discovering they were gay and HIV-positive: *"She did a total 180*°*, and the hiring manager sat there dumbfounded."*

Location plays a crucial role in career decisions, with 80% of LGBTQ+ professionals saying their identity influenced where they chose to live. A quarter of respondents had turned down job offers or refused to apply for roles in areas they deemed less LGBTQ+-friendly.

One participant explained: *"I've been approached for roles in the Middle East. Despite higher pay and great material living conditions, I would never put myself in that sort of environment as a gay man for mental health, legal and social reasons."*

**Going back into the closet for work**

While many LGBTQ+ people are open in their personal lives, the workplace remains an unwelcoming space. Just over half (52%) were out to colleagues by age 24, rising to 82% by their mid-thirties. One respondent said: *“Coming out allowed me to be more ‘myself’ at work and saved the energy I used to spend staying closeted.”*

Yet 32% never disclose their identity to clients or customers. One shared: *“I’ve lost followers and potential customers when posting LGBTQ+ designs. It’s something I’m working on accepting.”*

**A call for urgent action**

The *Pride in Leadership Report* is the first of its kind to provide such a comprehensive insight into LGBTQ+ workplace experiences. Claire Ebrey, co-founder of Pride in Leadership, and founder of On The Level Consultancy said: *“This report is truly groundbreaking. While other areas of diversity have been studied extensively, there has been a stark lack of data on LGBTQ+ experiences in the workplace until now.*

*“We hope it will drive real change, empowering organisations and policymakers to create truly inclusive environments where LGBTQ+ professionals can achieve their potential.”*

The report calls for urgent reforms, including stronger legal protections against workplace discrimination, greater transparency in hiring practices, and more inclusive leadership.

Companies must move beyond token gestures like flag waving and tackle the root causes of inequality - from platforming role models and investing in LGBTQ+ training, to stamping out homophobia and transphobia disguised as ‘banter’.

Matt Haworth, co-founder of Pride in Leadership and Digital Entrepreneur of the Year award winner, said: *"This research reflects what I’ve seen as a gay leader. From homophobia in meetings to being invited on trade missions to a country where I could be sentenced to death just for being me... the playing field is far from level."*

*“Now is not the time for organisations to step back from EDI initiatives. We need renewed commitment. Everyone deserves a fair chance to succeed – regardless of who they love or how they identify.”*

The report has been backed by key figures, including Baroness Barker, member of the House of Lords, who said: *“We are fortunate to be the first generation of LGBTQ+ people who can choose and pursue our professions without hiding essential parts of ourselves. If we are not to be the last, and if we are to ensure future generations remain equally free, we must heed this report’s calls to action.”*

Covering insights from over 1,000 LGBTQ+ professionals across different industries and career levels, the 90-page report offers a roadmap for progress. Its message is clear: systemic change is needed to ensure that LGBTQ+ professionals no longer have to choose between career success and personal authenticity.

* **ENDS –**

**Notes to Editors**

**Further commentary from Baroness Barker**

*“We must share our experiences of leadership – both triumphs and mistakes – and demonstrate the tangible difference LGBTQ+ leadership makes to organisations. Most urgently, we must ensure practical support is available as we face down the organised, international campaign which attempts to destroy human rights and roll back equality. This excellent report is one such tool to help us through the journey.”*

**About Pride in Leadership**

Pride in Leadership is the UK’s LGBTQ+ leadership community. With over 3,000 members, it works to elevate, connect and support LGBTQ+ leaders and aspiring leaders from all sectors, and enhance their visibility. Co-founded by Claire Ebrey and Matt Haworth in 2021, it offers a range of initiatives, including an annual conference, mentoring programmes, and a variety of online and in-person learning and networking events.

To learn more, visit prideinleadership.co.uk