



## #TeamNRW at the LGBT STEMinar 2020

Earlier this month, Richard Lewis one of our Specialist Advisors in our Monitoring Analysis team, attended a LGBTQ + Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) conference in Birmingham known as [STEMinar](#).

The aim of the event, is to showcase LGBTQ+ people in the STEM fields, which are traditionally thought of as heterosexual and masculine, and celebrate the diversity of people that can be found in roles all across the STEM disciplines. The event also provides role models for people who are either at a junior stage in the careers or considering the possibility of going in to a STEM field.

Here Richard tells us more about the day and why events like these are important.

“I know what you’re thinking, but no, I haven’t just mashed the keyboard! Last week I attended the fifth Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Seminar (STEMinar – get it?) at the University of Birmingham. We love an acronym.

Some people might ask why this is important. We’ve got same-sex marriage and gender-neutral toilets now, case closed right?

Well it isn’t.

Stonewall Cymru’s 2018 “LGBT in Work” report found that a third of LGBT staff hid their sexuality / gender identity for fear of discrimination, with a further 1 in 6 having been excluded from a work event because of it. If you’re spending that time trying to keep yourself safe, then you cannot work to your full potential.

The LGBT STEMinar began five years ago and is now coordinated by Dr Alex Bond and Dr Beth Montague-Hellen, with the aim is to provide a safe space where LGBT professionals in STEM can come together and be their authentic selves, as many STEM fields have connotations of a conservative workplace.

The conference began with a plenary talk from Dr Marina Logares, a visiting professor of algebraic geometry and mathematical physics, who was voted one of the 50 most influential LGBTQ people in Spain. Her talk was inspiring, uplifting and a bit perplexing (the maths...). She drew attention to a fantastic study showing that in problem solving, a diverse group regularly outperform an intelligent, homogenous group.

The atmosphere was amazing. I've never been to a conference with such a relaxed, fun and respectful attitude. Everyone was welcoming, had a smile and an enthusiasm to learn and communicate. Further, the event was funded by several professional bodies from all the STEM fields.

Given NRW's role with Flood Risk, I was fascinated by a talk on the use of mathematical models of aquatic plant surface area to model flow and flooding under different climate change scenarios. While painting a grim picture, it highlighted the important work being done to address these issues across different fields.

In the afternoon, I attended a workshop on building inclusive networks. While aimed mainly at academic settings, there were a few of us from Industry. Interestingly, there were many shared challenges with respect to attendee numbers and holding events. Something I'm hoping to work on myself in NRW with our Calon Network.

The conference closed with a poster session on topics including: the impacts of dog therapy sessions on therapy dog stress levels, the recovery of species following logging in tropical rainforests, the mapping volcanos on Mercury to name only a few.

I think the conference was worthwhile to attend as a gay scientist and helped me realise just how diverse we are. I'll be attending the next STEMinar in January 2021 at Oxford University, and I'm collaborating with academics from the Universities of Cardiff and South Wales for a bid to bring the conference to Cardiff in 2022."

You can find out more about [LGBTQ+ STEM on their website](#). If you would like to more about the conference or #TeamNRW's Calon network, you can send an email to

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