

Taking “Pride” in STEMM

By Claire Davies

When a member of the public is asked to picture a scientist, their mind’s eye is likely to conjure up an Einstein-like figure of a man draped in a lab coat with shabby white hair. Meanwhile, if they are asked to picture someone who is LGBTQ+, they are likely to instead think of an effeminate male actor or a short haired female comedian. They’re certainly unlikely to think of the same person. This lack of apparent cross-over between queer identities and STEMM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine) is amplified in the media: scientists who are not cis, straight, white and male are under-represented in [scientific media](#) and [professional awards](#). Meanwhile, annual “power list” rankings of LGBTQ+ individuals seem to overlook the STEMM sector: since 2013, the [Pride Power List](#) (formerly the Rainbow List and the Pink List) has featured a maximum of four STEMM professionals in any given year – the vast majority of whom are TV doctors.

It’s with this in mind that I founded [PRISM Exeter](#) back in July 2018 with support from fellow STEMM professionals employed at Network Rail, Tech Exeter, the Met Office, Exeter Science Park, and the University of Exeter. Our aim with PRISM was to provide a network for LGBTQ+ STEMM professionals and students in and around Exeter in which we would:

- increase the visibility and celebrate the work being done by LGBTQ+ people in STEMM;
- provide a space for intersectional discussions regarding improving equity, diversity and inclusion in STEMM more broadly.



PRISM Speakers Diversity workshop, July 2019, held in collaboration with BBSTEM (Black British Professionals in STEM).

I’m grateful to have been awarded a Biochemical Society Diversity in Science Grant to support PRISM’s activities during 2020. In February, we held a successful celebratory event as part of LGBT History Month featuring short talks by the winners of our [Queer STEMM Champions](#) student competition. This competition invited students aged 16+ from within the Exeter region an opportunity to champion the work and life of an LGBTQ+ person from

STEMM. It seemed a far cry from what would have been possible during my own schooling [under Section 28](#).



Our three Queer STEM Champions competition winners with guest keynote speaker, Dr Izzy Jayasinghe.

This year's events have also suffered from some major disruption though. The perceived threat of a repeat of the [student occupation of lecture theatres](#) during the UCU strikes, for instance, delayed the confirmation of our venue booking in February and consequently affected how widely we were able to advertise our event. Subsequently, we've had the COVID-19 pandemic to contend with.

As PRISM, I usually coordinate the local Science and Technology sector's involvement in Exeter Pride with interactive, science busking-style stalls in the festival's Family & Health Zone, a place in the Pride march under a "Proud to be Scientists" banner. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Exeter Pride 2020 has been postponed to late September and may still be cancelled.

However, we have still been able to take some major positives away from this new normal that we find ourselves in. PRISM usually hosts a quarterly *Speakers* series, each featuring talks from LGBTQ+ STEMM professionals and/or workshops on equity, diversity and inclusion. The UK-wide lockdown forced us to move online. I was able to use the funding received from the Biochemical Society to purchase a domain name and built PRISM Exeter a website to keep network members and supporters better connected. In addition, we moved our scheduled [Speakers event in July](#) online. This not only meant we could reach much further afield (the talks by our two Exeter-based LGBTQ+ STEMM professionals were watched from as far away as Canada, India, and Chile) but also provided us with an opportunity to record the talks which are now available to watch on [YouTube](#).

Whether our next *Speakers* event, scheduled for 17th November, will be in-person or online remains to be seen. In the meantime, you can follow [@prismexeter](https://twitter.com/prismexeter) on Twitter or sign up to the [PRISM Exeter mailing list](#) to receive news and updates.



The PRISM (Pride and Representation In STEMM Matters) Exeter logo. The light diffracting through a glass prism represents the spectrum of light as well as the spectra of sexual orientations and gender identities. The prism itself is a delta symbol, representing the change that is needed in STEMM.



About the Author

Claire Davies (pronouns: she/her) is a Research Fellow in the Astrophysics Group at the University of Exeter where she uses high angular resolution observing techniques to study how stars and their planets form and evolve.

More details about her research, scientific outreach, and diversity and inclusion work can be found on her website:

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