

BUSINESS & LEADERSHIP

Irish companies embracing LGBT diversity and inclusion

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Companies in Ireland are embracing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender diversity and inclusion in the workplace, writes Glen's Davin Roche.

Equality in the workplace is a critical priority for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Ireland. Whether you are already working or just starting your career, being part of a company that is inclusive and allows you to be yourself at work means a much more positive workplace experience.

As Margot Slattery, managing director of Sodexo Ireland and Northern Ireland, puts it: "For me, being able to be 'out' in a work environment that is free from discrimination has made work a much healthier and positive experience."

Ireland has seen great progress for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people including in the workplace over the last 20 years. Companies such as Accenture, CRH, Dublin Bus, Deutsche Bank, ESB, Dublin City University, EY, Microsoft, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Sodexo, IBM, Irish Prison Service, Ulster Bank and UCD have joined the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Glen) employers network, Diversity Champions. These companies are working with Glen to ensure their workplaces and businesses embrace LGBT diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the business whether it is recruitment, workplace culture or service delivery.

One of the interviewees in 'Working It Out', a major piece of Glen research published this year as part of the Diversity Champions programme, described the positive impact this can have: "Because of my employer's positive attitude to diversity, being out as gay opened doors for me that might otherwise have remained closed."

Unfortunately, in many workplaces across Ireland, LGBT employees are still invisible. Some companies have a reputation that discourages LGBT people from joining in the first place. In others LGBT employees decide to conceal their sexual orientation because of an exclusive culture within the company. Recent research found that 30pc of lesbian, gay and bisexual staff had experienced bullying and harassment at work in Ireland. Ten percent quit their job as a result. Many LGBT employees fear their relationships with colleagues could be negatively impacted by coming out at work.

"I am not out in my current job but I was in my last one. That was the reason I decided not to [come out] in this one. When I started my next job I said I would never be out again as it's not worth the hassle," says another interviewee in the Working It Out report.

Other LGBT people are worried that they will not progress in their careers if they disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity: "I assumed that if I was thought of as lesbian my career would be over. I could only think of one woman in my whole workplace who was out as gay and still successful."

Knowing that the company you work for reflects and supports the diversity of its staff in its workplace culture, policies and business objectives means that you can give your best to your job. Employees who are 'out' at work report 10pc higher engagement than those who are not out: "Now it is not the same tension on a Monday morning wondering how to navigate those questions about what I did at the weekend."

Today, good employers in Ireland are not just saying they are inclusive they are demonstrating it to their LGBT employees by joining the Diversity Champions network. Executive leadership is playing a proactive role within their companies and across business sectors. Glen is connecting member companies with thought leadership through the latest research and best practice seminars. Diversity Champions members are developing, improving, and promoting their LGBT inclusive business approach to recruit and retain top talent and drive business. Diversity Champions are connecting with LGBT graduates and job seekers through the group's annual LGBT Graduate Careers Directory.

Some Diversity Champion companies have LGBT employee networks that are working strategically with their executive leadership to embed LGBT inclusion in the workplace.

All employees benefit from an inclusive environment. Employers who embrace LGBT diversity send a message to all staff that they value their people for who they are and what they can bring to the table.

For more information visit www.diversitychampions.ie or call at 01 6728650.

Davin Roche is Glen's director of workplace diversity.

Pictured: Margot Slattery, managing director, Sodexo Ireland and Northern Ireland; Jean Michel Minnot, European head of diversity, Sodexo; Davin Roche, director of workplace diversity, Glen; Patricia Kelleher, assistant chief officer, chair, Inside Out Network LGBT staff network, Irish Prison

Service; and Catherine Vaughan, global compliance leader, chair of Unity LGBT employee network, EY

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