

A history of LGBT rights at PCL and the University of Westminster

Homosexual acts between two men aged over 21 years of age taking place in private in England and Wales were decriminalised in 1967 (following the 1957 Wolfenden report) but remained illegal for men aged under 21. This therefore affected the majority of students at the Polytechnic of Central London (PCL).

In 1973 the NUS was the first national body to pass policy in favour of gay rights, including supporting the creation of 'Gay Socs' at its member institutions.

Living on the edge of the crowd

WHO ARE HOMOSEXUALS?

Homosexuals, often called "Gay" people, are men and women who are emotionally and physically attracted to members of their own sex. Homosexuality is just one part of the whole spectrum of social, emotional and sexual orientation, of which heterosexuality forms the largest part.

Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, need and seek satisfying relationships with other mature people. If orthodox social views were not against them, they would be able to fully integrate into ordinary every day society. Homosexuality is not a disease, so it is irrelevant to look for a cure.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE GAY?

Every survey of homosexuality has reached the conclusion that at least one person in twenty is sexually attracted only to persons of his or her own sex - and probably a greater number are attracted to both sexes. This means that in the U.K. nearly 3 million people are purely homosexual.

The Kinsey Report showed moreover that 1 in 3 male adults had had some sort of homosexual experience - in their definition, as experience leading to orgasm - some time in their lives. Everybody has at least one homosexual friend or relative, and almost certainly more.

WHAT PROBLEMS DO HOMOSEXUALS FACE?

The homosexual has no problems simply because he or she is homosexual, except those created by the attitude of society, including those created by the law. Among young people in particular their problems include loneliness and depression. The young person who is homosexual will find that he or she doesn't fit in properly with heterosexual parties, discos, dances etc. and will give up attending.

Because of the fear of the stigma attached to homosexuality - the fear of losing

friends or incurring social disapproval - young men and women will rarely identify themselves as homosexual. Even though there will almost certainly be others among their friends in the same position, they won't get in touch.

THE CHANGING SITUATION

In recent years many European countries and some American states have liberated laws on homosexuality. More important there has been a great build-up of gay awareness. Homosexuals are challenging the discrimination of society. More and more homosexuals are 'coming out' i.e. making themselves known as homosexuals, rejecting secrecy and shame for pride and openness about their sexuality. Several organisations and journals have been formed in recent years for the benefit of gay people.

Within the student world, the N.U.S. has passed a lengthy motion in support of gay rights which calls for an end to discrimination and supports the setting-up of gay socs. within colleges.

Within the P.C.L., Union policy is that, "Union approves all moves envisaged by N.U.S. to promote a greater understanding of homosexual problems, and it supports efforts to bring the end to discrimination against gays."

P.C.L. GAY SOC.

It is intended to form a gay soc. within the Poly. Such a society would help end the isolation felt by gays within the Poly by providing social meetings and entertainments. Further, it would actively campaign for an end to discrimination of all types against gays both within and outside college.

Students interested in helping to form or joining a gay soc. should contact Richard Scragg either at the Union Office or the 5th floor letter racks in New Cavendish Street. (use the internal mail service) It is hoped to present a constitution and budget at the next Union meeting.

GAY INFORMATION

Organisations

Gay Liberation Front (GLF)
5 Caledonian Road, London, N.1.
01-837 7174
- Challenges not only society's attitude to gays but also the concepts of gender and sexual role playing.

Campaign for Homosexual Equality
22 Windmill Street, W.1.
01-437 7363
- Basically reformist - seeks equality within the general structure of existing society.

Homosexual Students Association
London University Gay Soc.
25 Gordon Street, London WC1H 0AH
- Social and Political information for gay students in London.

Centre
Broadley Terrace, London, NW1.
01-262 9595
- Gay counselling organisation. Free medical, legal and general advice. Open Monday-Friday 7 p.m.-10 p.m.

PUBLICATIONS

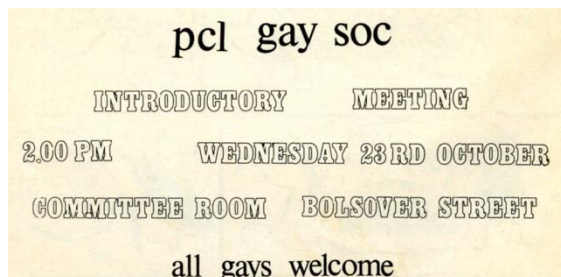
Gay News 15p
Fortnightly newspaper - mainly current news, reviews, information.

Sappho 30p (post paid)
A monthly magazine 'for women by gay women'
B.C.M. Petrel, London WC1V 6XX

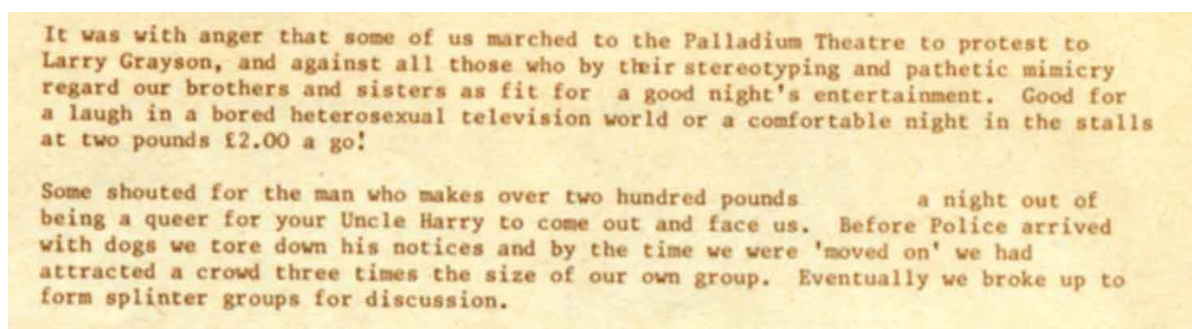
Lunch 25p
A monthly magazine. Articles, interviews, poems, news and reviews.
98 Felsham Road, London SW15

All these publications are available at better newstands and bookshops e.g. Collets, Charing Cross Road.

McGarel, the newspaper of the Polytechnic of Central London Students' Union [PCLSU] carried an advert for a formation of a Gay Soc in November 1973, and again in October 1974.



There are occasional reports of the new Gay Soc's activities in *McGarel*. In December 1974 they reported on a protest against Larry Grayson, a camp comedian then hosting the TV show '*Shut That Door!*'.



Throughout 1975 the Gay Soc were holding Disco/Party events, as well as informal social gatherings and one-to-one chats. However the events are rarely advertised in *McGarel* so we have very little archival record of the Society during this period, or of responses to it from the student body.

By 1978, the mood had become more militant. A report from the NUS Gay Rights conference demonstrated how the increased visibility of gay people in everyday life had led to verbal and physical attacks from individuals in the media and groups such as the National Front. The conference debated changing its name from the Gay Rights Campaign to the Gay Liberation Campaign – “Gay Rights connotes a legal reform, apologetic cup in hand attitude...whereas Gay Liberation implies a much more broad-based self-confident, proud and active campaigning body.”

gay liberation

80,000 people singing 'Glad to be Gay' along with Tom Robinson at the ANL Carnival this year was an emotional experience for many homosexuals, but the fight for Gay Liberation has only just begun. All last year, attacks on gay pubs, clubs, and meeting places increased in frequency and viciousness. The attack, by NF Nazi thugs on the Vauxhall Tavern a well known South London gay pub, when several gays were badly beaten is only the tip of the iceberg. 'Queer bashing' remains a favourite sport for police and Nazis alike.

The santimonious hypocrites who run W.H.Smith, while quite happily selling the usual line of sexist crap, have added 'Gay News' to their list of banned publications, along with the left press. NUS Conference was enlivened this year by a lightening picket of the local branch of W.H. Smug, calling for a national boycott until it lifts the ban.

PCLSU, like NUS, has a good policy on all moves to gay liberation, but like anything else resolutions are only effective if gays organise themselves to fight for their own liberation.

The 'age of consent' for gays is still 21, and as many students are under 21 entering into gay relationships puts them at risk from 'Big Brother'. Despite the fact that there must have been several hundred gay students at PCL last year, there was no active gay soc. It's time to come out of the closet, brothers and sisters! .

Some useful addresses;

Gay Switchboard (24hours) Bm London WCIV 6XX 01-837-7324 All round advice on legal matters, social events, etc.	Campaign for Homosexual Equality 33 King St, Manchester M60 2EL 061-2281985 Numerous social and cultural activities. Over 20 London groups.	Gay Activists Alliance c/o 5 Caledonian Road, London NI 274-0843 Campaigning gay organisation.
Gay News 1A Normand Gardens Greyhound Road W14 368-2161 Independent gay newspaper.	Sappho The Basement 20 Dorset Square NW1 274-3636 2pm-7pm except thur and sunday. Gay womens magazine also organises meetings.	
Icebreaker 274-9590 (7.30-10.30) Friend 359-7371 (7.30-10.00) Advice and counselling services.	Lesbian Line 794-2942 (Monday & Friday 2-10) (Tues, Wed, Thur 7-10) Lesbian-feminist. Help, advice, information.	

The same year the PCLSU's handbook mentioned the rise in attacks but also that there had been no active Gay Soc at PCL the previous year.

Gay

Before you skip over this section thinking it's got nothing to do with you...reconsider!

Gaysoc is not intended just for homosexuals/lesbians and bisexuals (though almost everyone is bisexual to some extent). This would be isolationist and thereby counterproductive. Everyone intent on coming to terms with their awakening/evolving sexuality is welcome.

We are all brought up under the assumption that we are solely heterosexual. Also, we are steered carefully away from anything that doesn't conform to what is considered the 'right' way to live. We are told that one day we must get married and 'settle down'. This idea is presented to girls as their main aim in life.

These ideas, together with those about monogamy, true love, fidelity, etc., are thrust on us from all sides, even in kids comics.



Loving people of the same sex as yourself means that it is extremely difficult to fit into this pattern, and as a way of life offers nothing to gay people. So now a sense of gay community has grown - a sense of being linked to all other gay people by our common need for each other, for support against the hostility from those who have not been able to see through the stereotypical roles they have been forced into playing and who find us 'threatening'; where we do not reject others because of their age, or appearance. The gay community is diverse and one of its challenges is that gay women and men should come together and explore the common ground they share.

If we let ourselves pretend that we are not gay then we are just helping to keep homosexuality and lesbianism a dark secret. It is important that we are all seen as we really are. PCLSU Gaysoc is here to help you do just that.

In 1980 the mood had changed again, the Gay Soc promoting itself as being relevant to 'everyone intent on coming to terms with their awakening/evolving sexuality'.

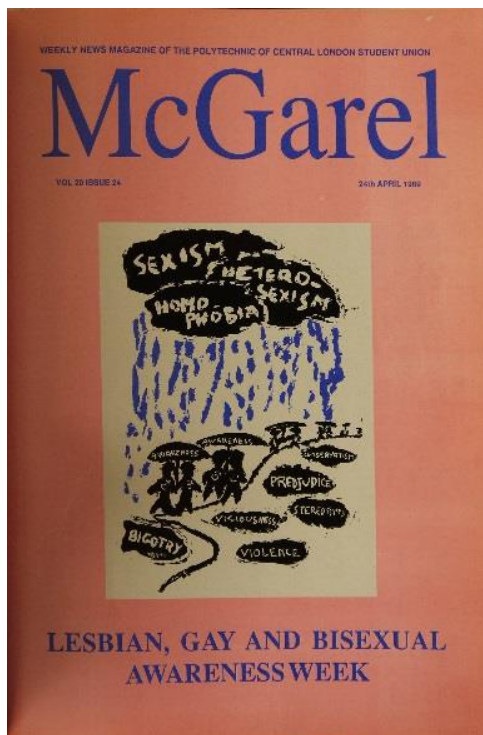
In 1984, Labour MP Chris Smith becomes the first openly gay member of Parliament; three years later the Conservative government introduces 'Section 28' which forbids local authorities from 'intentionally promoting homosexuality'.

Although PCL was a very politically aware place in the 1980s, there are few mentions of PCLSU's Gay Soc in the Archive for this period.



However with the growing awareness of HIV, PCL adopted a policy on AIDS in June 1987. This confirmed that 'infected staff and students [would]... be treated in the same way as other staff and students', and 'the fact that certain members of the Polytechnic appear to be in a particular risk group will not be used to discriminate against them in any way'.

In 1990 a revitalised PCLSU GaySoc started organising an Awareness week and a Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Film week. The President of the society, Adrian Ferrero became PCLSU's first Lesbian and Gay Officer the following year.



In 1991, the 'Pop Against Homophobia' campaign was launched from within PCLSU.

PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.

Pop Against Homophobia

LONDON, 14TH FEBRUARY 1991
CONTACT: telephone 071-636 6271. Ask for Adrian Be or Mark C. O'Flaherty, or leave a message.

Pop Against Homophobia (PAH) is a product of contemporary youth culture. PAH has launched its first advertising campaign (500 posters, size 60" X 40") featuring images of affectionate same-sex couples, throughout Central London, on 14th February 1991.

The aim of these advertising campaigns is: to

- Introduce positive images of same sex relationships into mainstream youth culture - images which are contemporary and non-stereotypical.
- Introduce the different uses of same sex relationships, romance and lifestyles, to youth culture and the related media (television, cinema, pop videos, publishing, fashion).
- Reveal the positive use of same sex relationship lifestyles to marketing and advertising companies in their promotions.
- Familiarize the general public with same sex relationships, romance and lifestyles.

PAH future projects:
The second PAH project is another advertising campaign consisting of 500 posters targeting Central London.
Other future projects will be in collaboration with pop stars, actors and other public personalities from popular youth culture.

===== DONATIONS =====

Pop Against Homophobia needs your money to continue these advertising campaigns. Please send donations to:
Pop Against Homophobia, 3rd floor, 104-108 Bolsover St, London W1P 7HF.
The running cost of the poster campaigns is £2 per poster.
A donation of £10 would pay for 5 posters being put up!
A donation of £100 would pay for 50 posters being put up!!
A donation of £1000 would pay for 500 posters being put up!!!

To order the PAH poster send £5. Add £1 p&p for UK and Europe.
To order the PAH t-shirt send £10. Add £2 p&p for UK or £3 p&p for Europe, per item.
To order posters or t-shirts use the above address. All profits go towards funding more advertising campaigns.

PAH would like to thank all the people who made this first campaign possible. The models: Zizi, Tania, Eddie, Dawn, Pia, Piers, Poo and Elio. The photographer: John Symon. The stylist: Marco. The make-up artist: David Jones. The photographer and directors: Mark C. O'Flaherty and Adrian Be.
PAH would also like to thank PCLSU for being so supportive to this PCLSU L&G Soc. project. A big thank you goes to all the people who donated money to fund these advertising campaigns.

The 1990s saw an increase in the visibility of the gay rights movements, after the formation of campaign group Stonewall. In 1994, the age of consent for homosexual men was lowered to 18 (it was finally lowered to 16 in 2001).

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual students at PCL (and the University of Westminster from 1992) were well-represented within their Union. The focus was more on socialising than campaigning, although the society supported both LGBT and AIDS awareness weeks.



SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL TRANSGENDERED (LGBT) SOCIETY

BY LEWIS BURNE

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER LGBT SOCIETY

IN THE WESTMINSTER LGBT SOCIETY we feel it's really important that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth not only have full representation in the student community, but an outlet for friendship and support.

It's now 2011 and we've made leaps and bounds in promoting equality in the UK. Still, the fact remains that we have a long way to go. Over 1 in 8 gay or bisexual men and women & transgendered men and women experience hate crime regarding their sexuality or gender identity. This may be everyday harassment, or extreme physical violence. Naturally, we need this number at 0. This barely touches the periphery of the issues inherent within and toward the LGBT community.

London's student queer scene is thriving and exciting and our society certainly aims to make the most of it. So whilst we look to reduce the awareness of LGBT issues through activism and education, we make sure we have good times doing it.

Ultimately, we're a multifaceted and awesome (I may say so myself) group of people. So, if you're looking to not only expand your understanding of the LGBT community, but to have an amazing night out dancing, never hesitate to attend one of our various events. Be that an exhibition, comedy, game of Trivial Pursuit, club, or drinks.

Find us on Facebook! Search: "UoW Westminster LGBT (UWSU) LGBT"

With the re-launch of the Students' Union in 2011, the LGBT Society – now known as the LGBTI+ society - continues to play a large role in the lives of University of Westminster students. The Society organises socials and seminars, and surveys its members about on-campus safety. In 2015 the University of Westminster hosted daytime events for the tenth annual National Student Pride festival at its Marylebone Campus. The festival returned to the University in February 2016. For University staff, the LGBT Staff Network seek to ensure that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer staff experience a safe workplace that celebrates diversity and actively encourages inclusion.

Unfortunately, our records of student life are very incomplete and so we are not able to present a comprehensive history of LGBT students and staff at the University of Westminster and its predecessor. If you have records documenting the Gay Soc at PCL or the University of Westminster, we would love [to hear from you](#). Or you may like to consider contributing to our [Oral History programme](#)? Again please, get in touch.