

# Speech: Minister for Women and Equalities Penny Mordaunt: Stonewall Workplace Conference London 2019

Thank you and thank you all of you there are so many people here today, it's fabulous to see that.

I want to start by extending my heartfelt congratulations to Stonewall as it celebrates its 30th anniversary. Thanks to everyone who has worked and continues to work in and with the organisation, for your hard work and your commitment and for fighting for justice.

It's no secret that we meet at a time of great turbulence, many of you are worried about recent events and I don't seek to convince you today that everything is going according to plan, or that this is quite what we intended or that you can please all of the people all of the time. But what I can do is remind you that we still have much to be proud of.

As I travel around the world listening, I hear many opinions and there's a notion out there somehow because we here hold different opinions that we're divided and that makes our strong nation weak.

Well let me tell you, I travel to many countries and in some of them there's no freedom of expression at all. Political opinion, plurality of thought isn't valued. There's no tolerance of diversity or race. In fact, there is rising intolerance, particularly of religious belief and of sexuality. And I must tell you that this absence of argument and diversity is no sign of strength any more than our current situation is a sign of weakness.

Sometimes this short-term division can prepare us for greatness to come and this is where Stonewall comes in. Over the last three decades that organisation has been in one fight after another and it's campaigned with markable dignity and resolve to successfully bring about change.

But what should employers care about peoples and organisations that fight for diversity, aren't they disruptive? Aren't they constantly attacking the status-quo? Aren't they just idealists full of hope and optimism? Yes they are and that's exactly the sort of people we want in a modern entrepreneurial operation.

These people cooking up radical change are the same people who bought you revolutions in personal computing, healthy food and retail. If you're building the businesses of tomorrow, you can never have enough brave, authentic, passionate, committed, hardworking colleagues who give you deep insight into your customers and your clients.

Sometimes just being yourself is the bravest thing that you can do and 30 years ago that took considerable courage.

It has become easier over time and Stonewall and its supporters deserve huge credit for that but we know that it can still take immense courage to be yourself. While many battles have been won, complacency is neither a desirable nor a commercially feasible option.

So, for everyone in this room, there are decisions for us to make. We could put these people under pressure, we could invent a private life that bears little resemblance with reality. We could ridicule, we could belittle them. We could talk behind their backs. They won't thrive, some will cope, others won't. Or we, in our respective organisations, could become leaders. We could become leaders of our companies, we could become leaders of our communities.

And if we want our colleagues to show spirit and leadership in their work, we have to show spirit and leadership in our boardrooms. This is no longer an issue of marginal social justice, it's a matter of management efficiency.

Why don't we harness human spirit and accept and celebrate brave, passionate and loyal people? Because if we do they will repay those that enable them to thrive, and when you do this not only do you recognise their leadership but you become a leader yourself.

Today's conference focuses on LGBT issues in the workplace. Do we want to thrive in our workplaces? Do we want to feel safe happy and complete? Or do we want just some of our colleagues to feel that way?

The Governments' 2017 survey about the experience of LGBT people made for sober reading.

19% of respondents were not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity with any of their colleagues at the same or a lower level.

23% had experienced negative or mixed reactions from others in the workplace and 11% of those in work had experienced a negative reaction due to someone disclosing that they were LGBT without their permission.

And behind every statistic there is a human story and behind every story there is a missed leadership opportunity.

A middle-aged gay man told us in that survey:

"As a university academic, my lack of openness surprised a lot of people. Despite my institutions' genuine attempts to create a friendly workplace for LGBT people, a couple of colleagues had been allowed to create a negative, homophobic atmosphere in my department."

A young trans woman reported:

"I had my workplace attempt to refuse sick leave for me for necessary medical treatments and I have been harassed by customers in my workplace. I have had customers cancel their service because of my gender identity. I don't feel safe, respected or equal as a transgender woman."

We can't see that when we make people, all people, feel welcome and safe at

work it's good for business. Maybe British business has so much talent that we don't need sensitivity, intelligence, authenticity and courage. Of course not.

My critics have chided at me for saying this, accusing me of being "far too woke for my own good." But this is not about being woke or pc or trendy. It's about the margin victory in every endeavour we set our hearts on. It's about respect, care, love and compassion for others.

And I know this from my military service as a reservist and later as a minister for armed forces. Self-knowledge, self-respect and self-confidence are an operational imperative to our armed forces. Which is why they have come a long way in such a short space of time.

Less than 20 years ago being gay could get you a dishonourable discharge from the military. The mere suspicion that you might be could see you subjected to all manners of bullying and today the armed forces have recognised the logic of what I have laid out here.

It is only right they should do so. You can't fight a war if you are busy obsessing over someone's sexuality or hiding who you are.

The military came to see this, that it wasn't just the right thing to do morally, but a matter of operational effectiveness that needed to be dealt with swiftly. And this year the army came 51st in Stonewall's list of the top 100 most inclusive employers.

Stonewall invited all army personnel to take a survey of their views on army inclusivity.

93% of non-LGBT respondents said they understood why the army is committed to LGBT equality. Meanwhile the wonderful Captain Hannah Graf was named Stonewall's Trans Role Model of the year. And all of which has been cheered by Lieutenant General Patrick Sanders, who is both Commander of Field Army and LGBT Champion for the army and has spoken of the army's commitment to being an inclusive employer that offers opportunities for all and reflects the society it represents and serves.

The change in the army on LGBT rights is like the difference between bayonets and smart missiles, yet it happened so much more rapidly and that should serve as an inspiration to us all. We want every workplace to be welcoming and supportive for everyone, it's the right things for individuals, it's the right thing for organisations and it's the right thing for the UK economy.

Last year in our LGBT Action Plan we made a range of commitments to promote inclusion in the workplace. We'll provide employers with free training materials, we'll continue to act on sexual harassment in the workplace, and convene a working group of employers to understand the experiences of LGBT employees. The GEO will work with employers to develop targeted interventions to improve the experience of LGBT people at work.

And I'm pleased to announce that this autumn the GEO will convene a series of events to gather views, share expertise and experience. Most of you in this

room have the knowledge and the skills to contribute, and we will shortly be setting out more details about how you can get involved. Please do so, and please continue to do the right thing.

And the civil service will continue to seek to be an exemplar of best practice, as will government ministers.

Ordinarily, few things are less exciting than machinery of government changes, even for avid fans of Yes Minister. However, the recent migration of the GEO into the Cabinet Office is significant. It integrates the GEO's work on things such as closing the gender pay gap, with ending inequality for LGBT people, and engaging more closely with business. We will be able to do more work, joined up, and take an intersectional approach, rather than presuming that people only need to be thought of as having one diversity characteristic.

It will help us tackle and have a sustained cross-government effort to combat inequality using all of Whitehall's expertise, energy and power. And I make no apology for the fact that government is making a series of equalities asks of business. Not because we want you to bear the burden of the costs, not because we want you to do more work, but because it will create a happier, more effective workplace.

And that means, frankly, that Whitehall has to walk the walk as well. Working as one in the sense that we are united in the effort, and working as one in the sense that departments are not replicating each other's work and overburdening HR directors.

When I came into this role nearly a year ago I did an audit of the asks that we are making from various government departments of you and your HR directors. The GEO is the lead on gender pay gap reporting and introduced ground-breaking legislation in 2017 which requires large employers to report their gender pay gaps on an annual basis. BEIS are asking you to report on Chief Executive Officers' pay ratios, the government also wants you to sign up to a range of schemes:

- the Race at Work Charter;
- Disability Confident;
- sector charters for gender equality;
- and the See Potential campaign

And all of these issues are vitally important and they all require energy and commitment. But this work isn't remotely joined-up or co-ordinated. And I want to say a big sorry to you for that. I want us in government to be much better at understanding the asks we are making of you in business. And the processes are only the means, it's the end, the creation of dynamic, diverse, high-performing businesses and organisations that really matters.

Proper buy-in from organisations depends on us working together in the cause of inclusion and equality, not in a way that creates unnecessary burdens. I intend for the newly-installed GEO to be basecamp for proper government-to-business communications, a vital dialogue which has been so evidently

missing, especially through the last couple of years. And we need to better communicate our national mission to you and we need to listen more to your needs, ideas and ambitions.

And there is a particularly strong imperative to support the rights of trans people in the workplace. In fact worries about different documents with different gender markers can make trans people fearful about even applying for a job. The government wants to make this process, and the wider experience of being trans, much easier. We want to reform the way that trans people can legally change their gender, and make the process far less bureaucratic and intrusive. We held a public consultation last year on how best to do this, and we received more than 100,000 responses and we're working hard to analyse them and will publish our response very shortly.

For too long LGBT people have had to endure intrusion and abuse whilst also experiencing being marginalised and silenced, and your conference today falls on Lesbian Day of Visibility so I'm going to now just read some of the responses we had from lesbians who responded to that LGBT Survey.

A woman from the south east said: "I've been careful only to share information regarding my sexual orientation with people I know I can trust and be certain that they won't react negatively. One person came out in my workplace in the last year and there were a lot of things said behind her back as a result and therefore I don't plan on telling anyone at work anytime soon."

Another respondent from Yorkshire said: "Having to constantly come out, worrying when you're starting a new job, pointing out homophobia in the workplace, and not being listened to, other members of the LGBT community also being homophobic, there's a lot to deal with on a daily basis.

And a young lesbian from the north west said: "My sexuality is often not taken seriously. At my workplace homophobic jokes and comments are often made which make me feel inadequate and unable to openly be myself."

Who would want to ignore that?

We must celebrate success stories, as has been said, and champion our role models, and with this in mind I want to close by saying a word about Ruth.

Ruth has done stellar work in her fight for equality. She's combatted homophobic bullying in schools, advised higher education establishments, supported role models, lead campaigns, and overseen vital research, and much has been done besides. And if we are going to look for leadership we don't have to look far.

Ruth you remind us all that it really is possible to make the world a better place.

And business does need to follow your lead. Our nation needs you all to do that. In the UK with our four nations radically in different places on social policy, and LGBT issues in particular, and politically divided, UK-wide and international businesses, all of you here in this hall today and listening

around the world, you're vital to forming the social fabric of our United Kingdom.

You see there is so much more to be gained, and so much resting, on your success. Over and above profit margin, or GDP, it's about our national identity, it's about our national values, and our potential, as individuals and as a country.

Thank you.