

## Keeping it Queer – LGBT+ Podcast

### Episode 1 Transcript

Transcript begins [00:00:00]

**Intro music** [00:00:00 - 00:00:14]

**ROB:** Hello and welcome to Keeping it Queer, the NUS LGBT+ Campaign podcast. My name is Rob, I use "they" pronouns, and I am your NUS LGBT+ Officer. [00:00:25]

**SARA:** And I'm Sara, I use she/her pronouns, and I am the NUS LGBT+ NEC Second Place, G-d it takes ages to say that. [00:00:37] [Rob laughs]

**ROB:** I missed last year when my job title was like, a sentence long. [laughs] And joining us today is the lovely Piers. Piers, do you want to introduce yourself? [00:00:46]

**PIERS:** Yep, I'm Piers, they/them pronouns, and I am the NUS Disabled Students Officer. [00:00:51]

**SARA:** The podcast is gonna be about political education, basically, on queer issues. And our aim is to release an episode every month, and each episode will have like a guest, that will kind of have a conversation with about the issue. [00:01:09]

**ROB:** From the get go, we really want to encourage LGBT+ students to get in touch with, either things they think we should be talking about, or people that they think would be really cool guests, etcetera. So if you have any thoughts or general, I guess, feedback on the podcast you can get in touch with us. We are @nus\_lgbt on twitter, or you can email us at [lgbt@nus.org.uk](mailto:lgbt@nus.org.uk). I am really happy because today is the first day I have been able to access that email address -[laughs]. [00:01:43]

**PIERS:** Oh my G-d, same - [00:01:45]

**ROB:-** So please email me! [00:01:47]

**SARA:** Aren't you like, in your second term? [00:01:49]

**ROB:** Yep, over a year. [laughs] So now you can email me and let us know your thoughts etcetera.

Shall I introduce today's topic, I guess? [00:02:01]

**SARA:** Yes... [00:02:01]

**ROB:** OK, cool. So for our first episode what we are going to be chatting about is accessibility at Pride, and then I guess more broadly as well, disabled LGBT+ student experiences in terms of like access to the community but also their experiences stand alone. I guess this makes sense for us to do as an initial topic considering the fact that like we are based in Manchester and it is Manchester Pride this weekend. So it feels like a natural thing to chat about, as it's kind of like on our radar, I guess? But also more broadly, it is Pride season in the UK, and this is something that I am seeing - I guess more broadly, accessibility at Pride is something that I am seeing more and more conversations about especially on *sosh meedz*. [laughs] [00:02:52]

**SARA:** *Sosh meedz*? [Rob laughs] [00:02:54]

**ROB:** I was going to try and slip that in. [laughs] [00:02:57]

**SARA:** I have never heard that before. Did you just make that up on the spot? [00:02:59]

**ROB:** No! I have said that several times before, thanks. So on social media [laughs], people have been kind of like raising their personal experiences recently. I don't know if either of you saw but what happened at Brighton Pride this year was there was an issue with the provisions that they had for basically allowing disabled Pride attendees to access the main

stage performancy thing. So basically what happened was they had like a "disabled tent" where they essentially shoved all the people who they didn't have spaces for on the wheelchair accessible kind of podium thing, which lead to loads of people kicking off, rightfully. And I think it was interesting to watch as Brighton Pride really fumbled with how to kind of like respond to this and it became increasingly evident that they hadn't like chatted to any disabled LGBT+ people before like putting on the event and stuff. And that kind of got me thinking and I think got a few other people thinking as well about how we create accessible, not just Prides, but like spaces for disabled LGBT+ people to exist. [00:04:11]

**SARA:** Yeah I guess also like something that I have definitely been thinking about for a long time living in Manchester, is the increasing price of Pride. Like, obviously, I don't think Pride should cost any money at all. Like I think in order for it to be truly accessible it needs to be free. Because I feel like I am increasingly seeing straight people who can like, afford it, are coming to Pride, and it is like a musical festival or a party to them. When it is supposed to be our space, to organise in and feel safe in, and if it is not accessible then it is never going to be the case. Like if Pride isn't accessible, then it is not for us. [00:05:02]

**ROB:** For sure, I think that is a massive thing. Piers is it OK if I pick your brain a bit in terms of how we define accessibility? [00:05:11]

**PIERS:** Yeah, it's definitely a difficult one. Because accessibility or access has been used for so much, both historically and currently, it's almost got no real value any more. Particularly for disabled people who are used to hearing "Oh, we are accessible!" and then you turn up and there are three flights of stairs, that's a true story. [laughs] [00:05:33]

**ROB:** Grim [00:05:35]

**PIERS:** Yep, it was a great hotel experience. But really we define accessible disabled inclusion as adjustments and attitudes and ways of working that allow disabled people to have equity in the same spaces as everyone else. You know, it can be physical access, so the thing that happened at Brighton Pride was it was very much they just, people don't expect there to be as many disabled people as there were. So there was a viewing platform for wheelchair users, because it is difficult to see over tall people, generally, but with a viewing platform you can see the main stage. But as always, there are a limited number of spaces, even when do inclusion right for disabled LGBT+ people. And its just one of those things where over 20 percent of the population is, identifies as disabled. And yet provision of things when they are accessible are less than easily two or three percent of things. [00:06:44]

**SARA:** Yeah also like its worth noting that, I think every queer person I know is disabled? - [00:06:52]

**ROB:** Yeah for sure, especially trans people, like I don't think I know a single trans person who isn't disabled? - [00:06:59]

**SARA:** Grim – [00:07:00]

**ROB:** Which is pretty high statistically because I only know trans people really [laughs]. Its like clear that there is a need for these spaces, to be taking that into consideration. But it is absolutely wild that it is still a thing that, it feels like a very basic, at least from what I have gathered a lot of the provisions required are incredibly basic, and yet Pride events are like "I'm so sorry we just couldn't... argh... we are ran by volunteers... argh" like - [00:07:32]

**SARA:** Well I guess that's how you know its like institutional, an institutional problem, right? [00:07:36]

**PIERS:** And when you hear, I do have some non-disabled friends, not many [laughter], and those who are non-disabled are often queer. Hearing about how they feel so safe and how they feel empowered by queer spaces, its difficult to not feel like just so angry and frustrated when you see all of the branding that shouts "were inclusive! we are all about making sure

that everyone can feel welcome!", and then you are like "Oh what about disabled people?" and they are like "Oh, we didn't think about that". Which I think is worse than if they have thought about it. I would rather someone tell me "Oh, we don't care", cause at least I know I can fight that person, but when the person tells you "we didn't even think about you", that hurts more because we are not even on their radar. They are not even having the discussion of "Oh we are volunteers, we can't afford to do this", or "we don't know how to do this", they just didn't think or remember that we exist. And I think that is one of the first fundamental things that needs to change is just remembering disabled people exist, and that there are a lot of us as the government often find out. [00:08:49] [laughs]

**ROB:** For sure, how do you take those initial steps towards trying to like break down the barriers in terms of access to LGBT spaces? [00:08:58]

**PIERS:** The first thing to do is think about that you need to do this. Its recognising that you have a problem. There is an interesting difference between universal design and inclusive design, which is a sort of pedantic area of disability politics - [00:09:14]

**ROB:** Sounds like your dream – [laughs] [00:09:16]

**PIERS:** Yes it really is, it very much is. So universal design is the one that I disagree with, which says that all spaces should be universally accessible for everyone, and we just know that's not possible. There are often disabled people with conflicting requirements when it comes to an inclusive space. And the thing is to do the inclusive design, we go "how can we provide spaces for everyone?", but it doesn't necessarily have to be all within the same room. If someone would like a quieter room, you have a quieter room. But you include them within that same space by just having a way in which to relay the sound from that room into the other room so they can still participate. And it is just coming up with creative and clever ways to meet the requirements of people that you would with someone who is like "Oh, I'm bringing my kid", you wouldn't say "Oh I am going to leave all the sharp knives out", like a lot of the time its just having a conversation with the person and I think the best part of any step towards inclusion particularly for disabled people is recognising that you are not going to do it well if you are afraid. And really, whilst there are some disabled people out there, as with any group, who would just love to jump on the hate and blame wagon, generally disabled people recognise and prefer it when you have a honest and open conversation with them. You go "I have no idea what I am doing, this is a personal failing, what can I do to make it better for you", rather than what usually happens is what I like to call corporate accessibility, which we see with corporate rainbow Pride, where everyone is like, you give us the labour, you give us your time, and you fix the issues that we have. And that's the bad way to go about it, where you are expecting them to fix your issues on your behalf. [00:11:15]

**SARA:** I guess like I think about this in a lot of contexts in like liberation, importance of just feel comfortable with being uncomfortable, I guess? Like if you actually talk to a disabled person and make yourself vulnerable and be like, "listen I don't know about this, and I am actually going to listen to you and accept that I have privilege and not just feel guilty and defensive about it", like I think thats really important. You have to kind of make yourself vulnerable, admit that there a things that you don't know and actually it's not about you [laughs]. And its not about your discomfort. [00:11:59]

**ROB:** I think that makes sense especially in like the contexts of Prides, at least in the UK is, when what I have seen, I guess not even in terms of disablism but when Prides mess up in other ways - [00:12:11]

**SARA:** Yeah - [00:12:12]

**ROB:** Like consistently happens, there is almost like a template response I have seen in the last few years whenever something goes wrong, there will be like a statement put out by the committee or something similar, that is very like "we are volunteers, we are working so hard, we are sorry but we are also kind of not sorry", its often that kind of weird apology where its like "we are sorry that you feel this way" - [00:12:35]

**SARA:** Oh my G-d - [00:12:35] [Rob laughs]

**ROB:** And like people are really like afraid, at least Prides, organisations, seem quite afraid to like own the fact that they mess up and kind of like use it as an opportunity to learn, and I wonder if like part of that is like fear of messing up. Because I feel like there is a lot of pressure to get it right when you are organising a massive event which is often like the only one of its kind in its town or city or whatever. But at the same time, like you say like, you need just kind of be a bit vulnerable in that situation. Like its not just for Prides but like more broadly, if you mess when it comes to access stuff - [00:13:12]

**SARA:** Yeah, I think my view is slightly more cynical [Rob laughs]. Because I don't think it is just about them messing up I think it is about the fact that like Pride, especially like Manchester Pride, London Pride, like corporate Pride, these issues are institutional, right? and I think that a lot of the CEOs and stuff are making major bank. Like do they care about disabled access? Or do they care about making money? Like, you know... [00:13:40]

**ROB:** Yeah... [00:13:41]

**SARA:** I don't know if that is like... but I think it's the truth. [00:13:45]

**PIERS:** I very much agree with you. They're like... disabled people are just so used to being told, you know, "You're too expensive to include". And that comes down to whole aspects of stuff. But I just wanted to touch on the, what Rob said about responses, its like "Oh we will make mistakes". And I am like, there's a difference between making a the mistake of going, "we didn't realise or didn't even bother thinking that disabled people exist", and going "we didn't order enough banners" - [00:14:12]

**SARA:** Absolutely, ones a mistake and a like - [00:14:16]

**PIERS:** Ones an institutional failing – [00:14:18]

**SARA:** Absolutely – [00:14:18]

**PIERS:** And the other one is going, we are overworked, we need help. But just relying on that, they are so used to just relying on that "Oh well we didn't know, but we will try better next time". There's no moment that they go, at no point within our decision making process, even with corporate stuff, there is no moment that they go "we haven't included you from the get go, because we didn't realise you needed to part of the conversation from the get go". And I think for disabled queer people's access at Pride, it is very important that we are there from the get go and we are there from the initial planning process, because we make it better. Like an accessible Pride is just a better Pride. Quite a few times I have organised protests and I have organised sort of fun evening activities, and if you make it an accessible space, or at least try to include as many accessible checklist things, not that I approve of checklists, but they do help sometimes, everyone has a much more enjoyable time. And you know, when Pride is supposed to be a protest and yet we see £70 tickets for this weekend. And we know that disabled people and that disabled queer people don't have much money. We know that we collectively are disproportionately likely to not have money and be in crappy housing and be in struggled public transport, and these spaces that are like taking over, very much because the people that are running them are so insular when they are running them, have a fault, they sort of like close ranks. And the responses are very much like that. They are very much like "we are closing ranks on the outsiders that are actually the reason why we have Pride in the first place. [00:16:15]

**SARA:** It raises the question, who actually is Pride for? [00:16:20]

**ROB:** A pricetag that is like attached to Pride as like an experience as well, is kind of like, it speaks true to this broader culture of like inaccessibility and cost when it comes to not just Pride season but if you want to go out and celebrate what is supposed to be like *our day* it also speaks to the truth that like our spaces are broadly quite expensive, quite alcohol filled, inaccessible, etcetera, not just at Pride but like all year round, like, the most natural

comparison is like Canal Street in Manchester, so a gay village and stuff. And thinking about stuff like how expensive it is to get in, are there like, is it actually safe to be trans in those spaces? No, its not. And it's similar, its the same as Pride itself, right? Like, it is supposed to be drawing back upon you know the advertisements are like "the day for everyone!", don't we love love, and being together, etcetera, etcetera? But at the end of the day there is that pricetag and there is the fact that it is not for everyone and that's really, really grim.

[00:17:29]

**SARA:** Yeah... [00:17:30]

**ROB:** I'm really really sad I think. [00:17:32]

**SARA:** Yeah. Drawing on Canal Street, its like the same for people of colour who sometimes they come to the Gay Village in groups and they get turned away because they don't *look* gay, or you know, these racist assumptions that groups of, especially men of colour together, are threatening supposedly. And also I think, I don't, is there like one venue in the Gay Village which has wheelchair access, like if you ask for them to put up a ramp in the back?

[00:18:03]

**ROB:** I know there is definitely *one* [laughs] [00:18:05]

**PIERS:** Well I have been there a couple of times during Disabled Students Conference, which I have been part of for a little while now, and there are a couple of clubs that I can get into. But it sort of leads me on to like, a lot of people go like "what, what can we do to be more accessible?" and you know really its just be honest with disabled people about what you do and don't have. Sometimes its really expensive to make your club that you have gotten not pre-built to be wheelchair accessible, you know. It is publicising that. Like we don't have step-free access. If you publicise we don't have step-free access, I am actually more likely to turn up. If you turn around and say, "we have two steps in", I'm like "I can do that, personally, I can do that". So I am more likely to turn up and I am more likely to want to be in that space. Like a story that I have from a couple of weeks ago, is when everyone went to this nightclub and it was not at all accessible, they made me go in though the kitchen entrance, there was another downstairs bit. They told me, you know, that I should be lucky to be allowed in this top bit. And that sort of attitude of sort of disabled people and particularly disabled queer people, should be lucky to just be included in our spaces, is often sort of like a main theme. And yet I, when I think about going for to a night club, I want to go somewhere particularly... you know I want to go to gay nightclubs, cause I enjoy them more, I think the music's better - [00:19:42]

**SARA:** Is it...? [00:19:43] [laughter]

**PIERS:** I mean... we all know how much I love puns and cheese, so it is really, it is really... [laughter] [00:19:52]

**SARA:** Not for the general population [00:19:55]

**PIERS:** Not for the general population. But it is just that thing of, I... I don't think I have ever... I don't think I can honestly say I have felt at home in a queer space. And that's because I am always thinking about my own access requirements, because no-body else was. And the first thing you can do is state what your access is. "Two steps", some people can do that, other people can't. "We have an accessible toilet", thats a big one... can I pee? [laughter]. And it is minor things like that, and then if you do state that your not accessible within certain frames, just don't use the words "we are accessible", or "we are not accessible" - define it. Tell us what you do have, tell us what you don't have. You know, people list how many floors they have got for a nightclub, but they won't list if they have lift. They'll tell you how big the internal space is, or how many bars they've got or how many, you know, just general things, you know, how many different dance floors they have got. But they won't have listed how many steps they have into the building or how many, if they have a quiet room in the building. And it is just one of those things of just... just tell us. [00:21:06]

**ROB:** But like, basically your conclusion there about what people can do is just incredibly simple [laughs]. Depressingly simple, and like just so, so easy. And I was going to do a thing of like, now lets draw in some student context, but I'm thinking like, honestly, its the same advice. If you're and LGBT Society, like, talk to your disabled members. You probably should have some kind of like guaranteed representation for your disabled members, like if you have a committee or similar, talk to them about it. But I guess also at the same time make sure that, making sure that your events are accessible is not the sole responsibility of like the token disabled person. [00:21:50]

**PIERS:** Oh very much so, talk to us, don't make - we are not good at heavy lifting [laughs]. And yet everyone wants us to do all of the heavy lifting, like you know, quite a few people want me to do leg work and as a wheelchair user that is a very bad idea. [00:22:03]

**SARA:** I was waiting for when the leg joke would come in [00:22:06] [banter noise]

**PIERS:** I had to include one. And it is very much like when we talk about students... students are very much volunteers. And I think that the one thing is never assume that you've the pinnacle of access. My own campaign is deeply inaccessible for some of my own membership and I am actively trying to change that for this year. Yet I know that I will always mess up. We will mess up, we are human. And it is to say, when you do get caught messing up it's not to say "at least we tried", its to turn around and go "I'm sorry, totally my own fault. I will change the process to make sure that this is included next time. But on top of that, is there any way that I can improve your experience for having missed out". Because that is a big rub as well, is Pride is once a year. Yet, if I can only... if I miss one Pride because it wasn't accessible, even if I have paid £70 just for a ticket, I will have to wait an entire year just to get involved again. By that point, I'm not going to want to. Like even the government understands that there's a difference between the medical model and the social model, the government claims to recognise the social model. And yet when do attendance of events, even if they are designed to be accessible, they are still designed to prove that your disabled. And prove to us that you're not just faking so you can get, I don't know, a really, really bad position in the crowd?[00:23:42]

**ROB:** Something that I just want to rewind to and unpack, I guess, you mention the social model of disability... people who are listening might not know what that means, or might have heard it...[00:23:54]

**PIERS:** Yes, I - [00:23:55]

**ROB:** We love a good learning moment [laughs]. So Piers, what is the social model? [00:24:00]

**PIERS:** We should, I think what we should start with is what the medical model is, so we can say exactly why the social model is better but not perfect. The medical model is based off the idea that a disabled person's impairment is what disables them. So the fact that I can't use my legs is the reason I am disabled. And it if often requires a diagnosis, it often requires an ample amount of medical evidence and it was constructed by and designed by non-disabled people who were medical professionals, hence why it was called the medical model. Yeah so, the social model is attributed to Mike Oliver and the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation. And basically they got together, a bunch of disabled people got together and as we do, we sort of went, "well it is not really our fault we can't access society, it is society's fault for not being designed correctly. And the example that I use to sort of re-emphasise the social model is there is so much legislation around the height and depth and width of stairs and steps. They have to be within, they have to be the right height so that people can walk up them. And that is because it is designed to be accessible to what people class as quote "normal person" unquote. Doorways, you know, I have met some six foot seven people, and doorways were not designed with them in mind. So it is because society hasn't been designed to include us, that we face disablement by society, and that is the social model. For example, a lot of my friends remark that if everywhere were step-free and

wheelchair accessible, I would actually have such a huge advantage over them, particularly in queues, particularly in restaurants where I don't have to worry about being seated, and particularly downhill. Like, I am known for being quick in my chair, and if I am disabled by society because of the way in which it was designed to not include us. [00:25:59]

**SARA:** I guess we thought we wanted to talk about disabled queer issues more broadly... [00:26:06]

**PIERS:** I think one of the big ones is having people's, having queer people speak for us. Non-disabled queer people speak on our behalf. Its helpful to have you amplify our voice, but please don't speak for or erase our voice. And like, the Brighton, if I remember, if it is the right video from Brighton, it is often the relative of a disabled person which gets the amplification. Like, "oh you should feel so outraged that my mum / friend / cousin / brother / sister / best friend / potted plant" [laughter] had this treated to about them. And yes you are sort of using your privilege but at the same time, like, surely you should be sharing that on behalf of what we are saying? And they often use, you know, not everyone is perfect, and that results in its own issues because you end up having a conversation about access and about disabled people, disabled queer people's access, without actually having including us at all, other than as the subject of your outrage. [00:27:19]

**ROB:** I guess I am going to the classic, slightly cheesy thing, of being like, "Piers, if people wanna get in touch or chat with you about any of the stuff that you mentioned", like how can they get in touch with you? [00:27:31]

**PIERS:** So as you said right at the start, I am on the *social meedz* [laughter] [00:27:35]

**ROB:** Its *sosh meedz*, actually. [00:27:38] [laughter]

**PIERS:** Ah right, as you can tell I am down with the kids. I'm findable on twitter, you can follow the campaign @nusdsc or myself @piers42, but generally we are also available... you can also find our resources through youtube if you just type in "NUS" and "social model", you will find a great video that was, great videos that have been done, and they are captioned. And you can also email me or find me at any of the NUS stuff, so my email is probably going to be in the description, but it is also piers.wilkinson@nus.org. So if you are a student, a disabled student, or wanting to run a society event, or run something for Pride, or generally throughout the year and you want it to be more inclusive, shoot me an email, it is literally my job at the moment. [00:28:34]

**SARA:** Isn't it dot org dot uk? [00:28:35]

**PIERS:** Is it? What did I say? [00:28:36]

**SARA:** dot org [00:28:37]

**PIERS:** It is dot org dot uk! [laughter] [00:28:39]

**SARA:** Can't believe I know Piers' email address and they don't even know. Also side note to the reference to the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy – [00:28:48]

**PIERS:** It is indeed. [00:28:49]

**SARA:** I love you [laughter] [00:28:50]

**ROB:** [sighs] Oh my G-d... I hate it.

**PIERS:** Never go anywhere without your towel. [laughs] [00:28:55]

**ROB:** Was that another reference...? [00:28:57]

[SARA laughs]

**ROB:** Please, please... I hate it. [00:29:00]

**PIERS:** ... which is also great [inaudible] advice. [00:29:02]

**ROB:** [sighs] Anyway, thank you [laughs] thank you for listening, and bearing with us for our first episode. We will be back with in roughly a months time, approximately, fingers crossed. We are running on gay time at all times. [laughs] So it may be one month, may be six months, we just don't know. But we will chat to you then. Thanks for listening, bye! [00:29:25]

**ROB and SARA:** bye! [00:29:25]

**End of Transcript** [00:29:25]