

Report from the Queerston Time Debate

By [Kate Marshall](#)

Tuesday 12 May 2015



Image: [Charles Hutchins](#)

For members of marginalised groups, voting in elections comes with the extra consideration of who will benefit, and who will hinder, your liberation. With that in mind, York St. John hosted 'Queerston Time: the LGBT Perspective on Party Politics', an hour-long panel with representatives from several general election candidates from both York constituencies. The event was chaired by the head of their LGBT Staff Network, Fiona Thompson, and took pre-planned questions from the audience in the style of the televised debates.

There were nine politicians in attendance, from the five major parties and TUSC. The night opened with two-minute introductions from each party, whether they had one representative or two. Despite a couple of gender binaries near the beginning, the representatives introduced themselves smoothly. James Blanchard, speaking for the Liberal Democrats, emphasised their historical achievements and remarked upon the absence of York Outer's Conservative MP, Julian Sturdy. This comment was picked up by Robert McIlveen, the Conservative York Central candidate, who condemned his counterpart's voting record in opposition to equal rights and same-sex marriage. McIlveen was the only candidate to declare his own interest in the issue, being gay and in a civil partnership, and acknowledged the division between his party's supporters and the party line, the former being less progressive.

Ginnie Shaw, York Outer's Green candidate, referenced the party's environmental policies; UKIP speaker Paul Abbott denied the existence of any LGBT-related policies at all, despite UKIP's declared plan to repeal same-sex marriage. He also declared the existence of 600 LGBT UKIP members, and also talked of their support from trans boxer Kelly Maloney, though he repeatedly misgendered her in his speech. Megan Ollerhead, representing TUSC, described intersectional problems with classist issues and the damage done by austerity.

The first question requested views on tackling LGBT hate crime. Rachel Maskell, for Labour, spoke first, and emphasised the need for affected people to be aware of the legislation available to protect them. Shaw drew attention to the loss of support organisations, whose funding, she claimed, has been 'cut to the bone'. Ken Guest (UKIP) acknowledged that he has never 'personally encountered' hate crime, prompting some laughter from the audience.

The second question highlighted the difficulty of changing gender in the face of bureaucratic processes.

Nick Love (Liberal Democrats) was able to give a strong response, declaring his party's aim to abolish the trans spousal veto – in which the partner of a trans person can block their legal transition – and to add a third, non-binary gender option to passports. Blanchard added his view that gender determination should follow name determination: 'you are what you say you are.' TUSC representative Meghan Ollerhead went further, calling it a 'question of abolition'.

However, the notion proved divisive. Paul Abbott, a UKIP representative, spoke of his work in issuing passports and, albeit unintentionally, declared an opposite stance with the same phrasing: that passports are there 'to make sure people are who they say they are'. He claimed that this is 'for your safety', despite the danger of any trans person being forced to out themselves.

The third question dealt with LGBT asylum seekers, and opinion was mostly united across the panel, that the burden of proof should not be placed on the victims. Abbott mentioned UKIP's division of immigrants and asylum seekers, and the planned point-based system. This prompted intervention from an audience member, who highlighted the troubling treatment of LGBT asylum seekers in that system. Joe Riches, the second Labour speaker, called the level of proof required 'absurd', and Maskell added the importance of foreign aid, to address the problem at its root.

The debate was well-chaired, but little was said that was outright contentious, and it was cut short before audience questions could be asked. While UKIP were undeniably the elephant in the room, with their famously homophobic ex-members and donators, it was clear that most of the panel members were not treading familiar ground. Nevertheless, their willingness to engage with the LGBT community, and their attempt to field the complex issues in a short time, shows promising awareness of the community's particular needs.



2 comments

Something, something YUSU.

13 May '15 at 12:49 pm

It seems almost pointless to release an article like after the election has already took place, and weeks after the even itself. It's too late to inform anybody who they might actually have thought about voting for.

I also wonder why TUSC gets the bare minimum of coverage that it was possible to give them; any less words and you wouldn't have known they were even present. Regardless of the chances of TUSC being able to win, or whether or not they can be listed as a 'major party' (they were the sixth biggest party contesting this election), the general consensus from the audience seemed to be that Megan was particularly impressive in her knowledge of LGBTQ issues.

From this article the impression is given that spoke only about class politics which is unfair and blatantly not the case and it seems a little unfair.

[▲ Report](#)

Kate Marshall

21 May '15 at 10:06 pm

I wasn't responsible for when the article was released, but I will say there were nine attendees to the evening and I had more notes on what was said than I was able to include. You'll notice that I did actually quote her views at the end of the fifth paragraph and she got more mention than Joe Riches.

For what it's worth, I thought Megan was great, had some of the most progressive views there, and whilst it might sound dismissive to reference her use of intersectionality, I consider that to be a very positive thing.

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