Prof. Saul Tendler - Acting Vice-Chancellor

I am delighted to be here today to raise the Pride Flag alongside staff and students from across the LGBT community.

At these moments previously, VCs have reflected on the history of the Pride flag, or on the development of Pride activities at York. I want to take a slightly different approach and talk - perhaps, if you’ll humor me, a bit overly literally - about pride itself.

I am deeply proud as Acting Vice-Chancellor to have seen first hand the dedication of our staff and students in putting on events like this. I know that these events, and the other brilliant things that will be taking place this month, take a huge amount of time and effort to organise. I’m proud of the commitment by staff and students to these causes and particularly today to Pride and to supporting the LGBT community across campus and across the city.

I’m proud of the huge achievements by our LGBT staff and students in their own work, be it their studies, research, teaching, and I’m proud of the visible role models many here today are in their own disciplines both for others in York, and beyond.

I’m proud of the way we come together as a campus to celebrate. Events like today are important moments to look at what has been achieved and celebrate our own communities and with supporters and allies.

I’m proud to be standing side by side with the LGBT community today at a time when LGBT rights feel under renewed attack. Whether that is through protests outside primaries schools who are - rightly - teaching kids about the many different kinds of loving families, or from attacks on the rights of LGBT parents in the US and closer to home too.

And so finally, I’m proud that we don’t stop. We know that there is still discrimination out there - we know that there is still work to do to ensure we are a truly open and inclusive University for everyone who works, studies or simply visits here.
I'm proud to play a part in that, proud to see so many faces here from across the institution who are also playing their part. And I'm proud of the role we play in the wider community, reaching out across the city and region with an inclusive and welcoming message.

So - a huge thank you to everyone involved in today’s events and I think now we are going to hear from David Smith, Alex Palmer and Hannah Smith before raising the flag.
It’s great to be here at this flag raising and to celebrate Pride openly on campus.

Sometimes people ask why Pride is necessary in this day and age. I have recently been involved in a survey of those working in STEM, science technology, engineering and maths, to find out about their experiences as LGBT+ members of the workforce. It officially reports its results later this month. Sadly, 1 in 6 of the LGB respondents have experienced exclusionary behaviour or harassment in the last 12 months. This rises to 1 in 3 of Trans respondents to the survey. These are people working in institutions like this one, or with employers here in Britain – it was a UK survey. This shows that even here, where we believe LGBT+ people have made so much progress, there are still problems to solve.

One of the problems with LGBT+ diversity is that it is hidden. You cannot easily tell by looking who is LGBT+, people cannot easily find people like them. This is why symbols matter so much – they speak to people and provide hope. This is why so many things the university has done are positive, such as this flag raising ceremony.

There are many more symbols that are important in a university setting. For example, using inclusive language in university policies and procedures – for example referring explicitly to issues of sexuality and gender identity in bullying and harassment policies encourages people to know they will be supported. Asking all new students their preferred gender pronouns or, as the university has started to do, labelling toilet doors where possible to make it clear that all genders are welcome. Such symbolic, and practical, acts have large impacts on the affected communities.

It is important to remember that the university is a hugely diverse community. Many staff and students working and studying here are international – originally coming from countries where to be LGBT+ is illegal. It can be difficult for them to transition the return back to their countries of origin after spending time as part of an inclusive and welcoming community like York. It is our responsibility as a community to help and support them in doing this.

We have come a long way in the UK, and life is much better than it was, especially in places like this. But there is still much more for us to do, and Pride is the time to celebrate our progress, but also to think about how to make the next steps forward.
Hi all - I'm Alex, he/him pronouns. I know the VC has just talked about how proud he is of the university, but I'd like to ask you all something.

What are we doing to make things better?

Because we need to push for not just tolerance and acceptance, but active inclusion of queer people.

I'm lucky - over the four years of my degree, I've been part of a very inclusive department that listened to me and supported my needs. I've given talks to staff and to undergraduates on my experience as a trans person, and I've been invited to speak at academic meetings to raise awareness and push for improvements. Other departments have invited speakers that think I'm a danger to society for existing as myself and wanting to be treated with basic human dignity.

Clearly some parts of this university still have a long way to go, and we cannot be complacent.

At a time when hate crime is on the rise and some of us are still not legally recognised, not protected under the law, we have to do better and we have to keep fighting.

I think we also need to support diverse voices from within our community, so as the first three speakers have been men I'm going to hand over to a woman - thank you.
Thank you for those words Saul.

I’d like to share with you why Pride is important to me.

The 28th June 2019 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. For those of you unfamiliar with the Stonewall riots, it started at 1:20am when police raided the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich, NYC. Customers were hauled out onto the streets in handcuffs - some however resisted. Led by trans women, women like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Johnson, thousands of people raised their voices together in protest. What followed in the subsequent days would change LGBT activism forever. It sparked the dawning of a new era, a new cultural awareness for a community marginalised by society.

As a gay woman, that is why Pride is so important to me and whilst we have come so far in the last 50 years and we should absolutely celebrate that, Pride for me is also a time to remember and reflect. To think about the people who continue to face persecution and violence every day. The examples Saul has given us here today tells us there’s still a long way to go - a way to go for the...

- For the trans person whose gender re-assignment decision lies in the hands of someone who they’ve never met.

- For the single gay dad whose child deserves to know that his family is not a 2nd class family.

- And for the bi woman who continuously gets asked the question ‘but what do you actually prefer?’

Here at York, we are making a difference.

I’m proud that we’ve recently rejuvenated our staff network. As part of this, one of our key aims is to support the development of an inclusive culture within the University and beyond. Central to this is our commitment to working collaboratively with our student groups. And I’m super proud that we will be walking together as a University community on Saturday.

So - we would love to see you there on Saturday to march with us. We are meeting at the Minster at 11:20am and we’ve got a stash of t-shirts to give away to the first 35
people who join us. Our tees are blue which for those who don’t know, blue is the
colour on the pride flag that represents Harmony - so make sure you add a splash of
blue to yourself on Saturday.

If you can’t make the march, come by our University Stalls later on in the afternoon.
Our awesome Physics department have some cool experiments lined up their
colourful sleeves.

So thank you for being here today, for being present and for being visible. It means a
lot to a lot of people.

**Note:**
red means life
orange means healing
yellow means sunshine
green means nature
blue means harmony
purple means spirit