



Building the Next Decade - Section 28

Older Queer Voices Roundtable2 Report

29 July 2026
Coin Street, London

Executive Summary

Building the Next Decade - Section 28 brought together campaigners, educators, activists, community leaders and intergenerational voices to reflect on one of the defining chapters in modern LGBTQ+ history and consider what it continues to teach us today.

Although Section 28 was repealed in Scotland in 2000 and in England and Wales in 2003, its influence continues to be felt through the lives and experiences of those who lived through it. The Roundtable explored how that period shaped education, visibility, community organising, activism, family life and representation, while also recognising the extraordinary solidarity that emerged in response.

Throughout the session, contributors shared lived experiences from different perspectives and generations. Together, they explored how storytelling preserves history, strengthens communities and creates opportunities for future generations to learn from those who came before them.

Several themes emerged consistently throughout the discussions. The importance of visibility. The role of education in shaping understanding. The value of representation. The strength found in collective action. The importance of intergenerational dialogue. Above all, the conversations demonstrated that stories remain one of the most powerful ways of creating understanding and inspiring change.

This report captures the key insights, reflections and provocations shared throughout the Roundtable. It is intended to support continued conversations across community organisations, schools, workplaces and public institutions, ensuring that the lessons of Section 28 continue to inform the future we are building together.



Welcome from Coin Street

Keith Winestein, Communications and Media Manager at Coin Street, welcomed participants on behalf of the organisation and its LGBTQI+ Staff Group. He spoke about the group's work to ensure that LGBTQ+ experiences are represented within the life of the building and made clear that every person attending the Roundtable was welcome at Coin Street.

That welcome was made tangible through his explicit affirmation that participants could use whichever toilet facilities they preferred, including gender-neutral and trans-inclusive facilities. It reflected Coin Street's commitment to ensuring that inclusion is experienced, rather than simply stated.

Keith also recognised the work of Tara Deeley and colleagues from Coin Street's conference team, whose support helped make the Roundtable possible.

Opening Reflections

Raga D'silva

Co-Founder, Older Queer Voices

Welcoming participants, Raga D'silva reflected on the vision behind Older Queer Voices and the role storytelling continues to play in its work.

Describing Older Queer Voices as a community of creative activists, she spoke about storytelling as one of the most powerful ways to preserve history, strengthen communities and create meaningful conversations across generations. While activism takes many forms, she reminded participants that lasting change often begins when one person shares their story and another person truly listens.

She reflected that if communities do not tell their own stories, they risk not only being erased from history, but having those stories retold through someone else's lens and shaped to fit someone else's narrative. Older Queer Voices was created to ensure that the lived experiences of older LGBTQ+ people remain part of our collective history while helping shape the future through intergenerational conversations.

Raga also spoke about the growth of Older Queer Voices from conversations around a kitchen table into podcasts, festivals, books, films, research and national Roundtables, with those conversations now extending internationally. The Roundtable itself reflected that vision, bringing generations together to share experiences, learn from one another and help shape the next decade for LGBTQ+ communities.



Welcome Address

Lord Chris Smith

Lord Chris Smith delivered the Welcome Address, drawing on his experience as a serving Labour MP and Shadow Cabinet member when Section 28 became law. His reflections set the context for the Roundtable, inviting participants to look beyond the legislation itself and consider the lasting influence it had on individuals, institutions and communities.

He spoke about the way Section 28 emerged at a time when few anticipated the significance it would have. Although introduced through local government legislation, its influence reached into schools, local authorities and public institutions, shaping the confidence with which LGBTQ+ lives were acknowledged and discussed.

One of the strongest messages from his address centred on what many contributors later described throughout the session as the *chilling effect*. Teachers, support workers and organisations became increasingly cautious, limiting opportunities for open conversations and reducing the visibility of LGBTQ+ lives within education and public life.

Lord Smith also reflected on the remarkable community response that followed. Section 28 brought campaigners, activists and organisations together with renewed purpose, strengthening relationships across the community and laying foundations for many of the advances that followed.

He encouraged participants to look beyond the history of Section 28 and consider what it continues to teach us today. Progress, he suggested, grows strongest when communities remain connected, engaged and willing to learn from one another.



Voices from the Roundtable

Joseph Galliano-Doig MBE

Chair

Joseph Galliano-Doig MBE opened the Roundtable by inviting participants to look beyond Section 28 as a piece of legislation and instead consider its human impact. The discussion, he suggested, was not simply about what happened during those years, but about the lives that were shaped by them and the lessons they continue to offer today.

Reflecting on his own experience of growing up during the years of Section 28, Joseph spoke about the absence of visible LGBTQ+ role models and the lasting influence that silence can have on a young person's understanding of themselves. For many, the legislation became more than law. It shaped culture, education and the confidence with which people were able to live openly.

He also reflected on the recurring pattern of moral panic that has appeared throughout history, where political narratives present minority communities as threats to society. While the language may change, he observed that the underlying pattern often remains familiar. That reflection resonated throughout the discussion, with contributors considering how communities respond when fear begins to shape public debate.

Throughout the session, Joseph encouraged participants to move beyond reflection and into dialogue. Every contribution was welcomed with equal respect, allowing lived experience, professional expertise and personal stories to sit comfortably alongside one another. His thoughtful chairing created the conditions for a conversation that was generous, respectful and deeply reflective.

One idea introduced by Joseph continued to echo throughout the Roundtable: history offers its greatest value when it helps us understand the present and shape the future.

Sarah Drummond

Sarah Drummond drew attention to one of the least visible consequences of Section 28: the experience of growing up without language.

She reflected on how many young LGBTQ+ people did not know why they felt different or where they belonged. The absence of representation meant there were few opportunities to recognise themselves in the world around them. Without language, identity remained difficult to understand, and without visibility, many experienced isolations without fully understanding its source.

Sarah reminded the Roundtable that representation is far more than visibility. It creates understanding, offers reassurance and allows people to recognise that they are not alone. The



discussion that followed reinforced this point repeatedly, with contributors reflecting on the importance of seeing LGBTQ+ lives represented honestly within education and public life.

Her contribution encouraged participants to think about representation not as an aspiration but as an essential part of creating communities where people are able to flourish.

Jane Traies

Jane Traies brought the perspective of someone who had experienced Section 28 from the classroom. As a teacher and later Headteacher, she reflected on the personal conflict of wanting to support LGBTQ+ pupils while working within an education system shaped by silence and fear.

She described how the legislation affected not only young people but also teachers, many of whom felt unable to be open about their own identities or provide the support they knew pupils needed. Looking back, she spoke movingly about the lasting emotional impact those years had left on her.

"I watched the spirit of it soak into the very fabric of the education system."

Jane reflected that although Section 28 was eventually repealed, its influence continued long afterwards. Seeing LGBTQ+ teachers and pupils marching together at Brighton Pride years later filled her with hope, while also reminding her of "all those lost years, and all the children that we failed."

Jonathan Blake

Jonathan Blake brought the perspective of someone whose life has been shaped by both HIV activism and LGBTQ+ campaigning over more than four decades. Reflecting on his experiences as a member of Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) and as one of the UK's longest-surviving people living with HIV, he spoke about the devastating impact of introducing Section 28 at a time when the community was already living through the AIDS epidemic.

He described the legislation as "insidious", not simply for what it said, but for the silence it created. By making it harder to talk openly about LGBTQ+ lives and relationships, it reinforced fear, isolation and misunderstanding at a time when openness and education were desperately needed.

"The very fact that a government could bring in Section 28 absolutely at the time that HIV was just being known in this country was absolutely monstrous."

Jonathan reflected that, although Section 28 was never tested in the courts, its influence was felt throughout society. Its legacy, he suggested, continues to shape LGBTQ+ lives today, reminding the Roundtable that the effects of legislation are often measured not only by what it changes in law, but by the fear and silence it leaves behind.



Robin Panrucker

Robin Panrucker reflected on his experience of spending his entire secondary education under Section 28, describing a school environment where silence meant many young people were unaware of the legislation, yet deeply affected by its consequences. Daily bullying became part of school life, while the absence of open conversations about LGBTQ+ identities left many students feeling isolated and unseen.

Looking back, Robin also recognised the quiet courage of two teachers who encouraged him to be himself and supported his passion for drama, often in subtle ways that challenged the restrictions of the time. Their kindness demonstrated that even within an environment of silence, individual acts of support could have a lasting impact.

"I make sure I am the visible person I didn't see when I was growing up."

Robin went on to draw a connection between the past and the present, reflecting on the growing pressures facing diversity and inclusion initiatives within organisations. He spoke candidly about the influence of changing political climates on workplace visibility, warning that the "chilling effect" discussed throughout the Roundtable is beginning to reappear in different forms. His contribution reinforced the importance of visible leadership and creating workplaces where everyone feels safe to be themselves.

Ray Carter

Ray Carter brought the perspective of a younger generation of LGBTQ+ leadership, speaking from their role at LGBT Consortium, where they work closely with community organisations across the sector. While acknowledging the progress that has been made over the past decade, they reflected on the increasing pressures facing LGBTQ+ organisations, particularly those supporting trans communities.

They described a landscape where charities and grassroots organisations are being asked to fill gaps once met by public services, often with limited resources and increasing demands. Alongside this, they spoke about the wider political climate, the growth of anti-rights movements and the pressure these place on activists and community organisations alike. Rather than viewing these challenges in isolation, Ray encouraged the Roundtable to recognise them as interconnected struggles requiring collective responses.

"We need solidarity more than ever, not just within our communities, but also outside of our communities, across movements. That's what solidarity is."

Ray concluded by turning to those who had lived through Section 28 with three questions rather than three answers. They wanted to learn how previous generations had created community beyond formal systems, how they sustained solidarity during difficult times and, perhaps most importantly, how they held on to hope when the future felt uncertain. Their contribution captured the spirit of intergenerational dialogue that sat at the heart of the



Roundtable, reminding everyone that experience is not simply something to remember, but something to pass on.

Claire Truscott

Claire Truscott reflected on how Section 28 transformed her from a young woman enjoying London's lesbian community into an activist determined to challenge injustice. She described the shock of seeing the legislation become law despite widespread protests, and how that moment became a catalyst for collective action across the LGBTQ+ community.

She recalled that, before Section 28, the gay men's and lesbian communities often organised separately. The legislation brought people together in a common cause, creating new alliances and strengthening a movement built on visibility, solidarity and shared purpose. Her own journey into activism led her to join the Pride organising committee, helping establish what would become the first EuroPride in 1992.

"It encouraged many people to come out, to step up and be visible. Opposition to this law succeeded in bringing all the sections of the queer communities together with allies for the first time in decades. It radicalised me. I became an activist."

Claire also reminded the Roundtable that the legacy of Section 28 extends beyond education. The legislation shaped attitudes towards housing, care and public services, leaving many older LGBTQ+ people without specialist support as they age. Her contribution highlighted that while Section 28 has been repealed, some of its consequences continue to influence the lives of older LGBTQ+ people today, reinforcing the need to keep challenging inequality wherever it exists.

Ted Brown

Ted Brown reflected on a lifetime of activism, reminding the Roundtable that Section 28 did not emerge in isolation but formed part of a much longer struggle for LGBTQ+ equality. Having helped organise the first Pride march in 1972, he spoke about the optimism of those early years and the shock of seeing Section 28 introduced sixteen years later.

He observed that, despite the progress made, the legislation reinforced the message that LGBTQ+ lives should remain invisible. Yet, like many others, he also recognised that adversity strengthened community organisation and encouraged more people to become visible and politically engaged.

"Section 28 came as a bit of a surprise... but it needs people to stand tall... to create the future that we all hoped for as young people, because we're not there yet."

Ted also spoke about the importance of what he described as the community's "invisible energy" - the determination, resilience and collective spirit that often goes unnoticed but has sustained LGBTQ+ activism through decades of challenge. He reflected that while legislation can attempt to silence or marginalise communities, it cannot extinguish the quiet resolve of



people committed to creating change. His contribution was a reminder that progress is driven not only by those who stand on the stage, but also by countless individuals whose everyday courage continues to move the community forward.

Laïla El-Métoui

Drawing on more than three decades in education, Laïla El-Métoui shared three lessons from her experience as a teacher and Founder of Pride in Education. She reflected on leading one of the first LGBT History Month programmes in a further education college following the repeal of Section 28, only to discover that changing the law had not immediately changed attitudes. Posters were repeatedly torn down, resistance remained, and many teachers still feared speaking openly about LGBTQ+ lives.

"Silence outlives legislation. Although the law was gone, years of enforced invisibility meant teachers still feared naming LGBT lives."

Laïla spoke about the importance of what she described as **"usualising"** LGBTQ+ lives within education, ensuring they are woven naturally throughout the curriculum rather than treated as an occasional topic. She argued that when learners see themselves reflected in everyday teaching, prejudice loses its power and difference becomes understood as an ordinary part of society.

"When learners see themselves, when they know that LGBTQIA+ people exist in lesson content, prejudice loses its oxygen, and young people grow up knowing difference is ordinary."

Her final reflection looked firmly to the future. Laïla warned that history can repeat itself if communities become complacent, highlighting current challenges around education guidance and the need for genuinely intersectional inclusion. She reminded the Roundtable that LGBTQ+ communities are strongest when every identity is recognised and protected, concluding with a message that captured the spirit of the day: progress has always been built collectively, lesson by lesson, classroom by classroom.

Nicola Fenton

Drawing on her experience of growing up in Aotearoa, New Zealand, Nicola offered an international perspective on the legacy of Section 28. Although she did not live under the legislation itself, she reflected on how its influence reached far beyond Britain's borders, shaping attitudes, education and the visibility of LGBTQ+ lives in other parts of the world.

She described growing up without language, role models or openly LGBTQ+ teachers, recalling how silence became part of everyday life. Reflecting on being expelled from school at the age of sixteen after expressing that she thought she might be gay, Nicola spoke about the profound impact that prejudice and invisibility had on young people searching for a sense of belonging.



"Margaret Thatcher's government didn't just create legislation, it legitimised silence. Laws shape culture, but culture also travels, and it travels fast... Shame doesn't need a passport."

Nicola drew powerful parallels between the past and the present, observing that when LGBTQ+ rights come under attack in one country, the consequences are often felt far beyond its borders. Her contribution reminded the Roundtable that prejudice does not respect borders, and neither should solidarity. The lessons of Section 28 continue to resonate internationally, making global conversations and collective action more important than ever.

Lisa Power

Lisa Power reflected on the extraordinary community response that emerged during the years of Section 28 and the HIV epidemic, recalling how activism often grew from people recognising a shared responsibility to one another.

She spoke about the value of community organising and the importance of creating movements that welcome different approaches to change. Lasting progress, she suggested, has always depended upon people bringing different skills, experiences and perspectives to the same cause.

Lisa also encouraged participants to continue creating spaces where lived experience is recognised as knowledge in its own right. The stories carried by older generations offer insight that strengthens future leadership and provides context for those continuing the work today.

Her contribution reinforced one of the defining themes of the Roundtable: communities become stronger when knowledge is shared generously across generations.

Keith Winestein

Keith Winestein reflected on how HIV and AIDS and the introduction of Section 28 shaped his path into activism. Without the confidence to take to the streets, he volunteered with Frontliners, supporting people living with HIV. This led to work within the NHS and twelve years at the National AIDS Trust, where he refused to allow Section 28 to obstruct vital work tackling HIV stigma and discrimination.

Turning to the present, Keith described the solidarity he witnessed at London Trans+ Pride. He challenged lesbian, gay and bisexual people who distance themselves from the trans community to recognise that the arguments now used against trans people echo those once directed at them.

His provocation asked:

"How do we get compassion back into ordinary people's lives, so that we campaign and look out for others who are being discriminated against?"



Keith's contribution reminded the Roundtable that when one part of the LGBTQ+ community is targeted, none of us can afford to look away.

Charlie (Online)

Joining online, Charlie reflected on the importance of ensuring that conversations about Section 28 remain relevant to younger generations.

Charlie observed that many younger LGBTQ+ people know the name "Section 28" without fully understanding the ways it influenced everyday life. Creating opportunities for intergenerational dialogue allows history to become personal, helping people connect legislation with the lived experiences of those who experienced it.

The contribution also encouraged participants to consider how future generations will look back on the conversations taking place today. Preserving stories now ensures that future communities inherit lived experience alongside historical facts.

Charlie's reflections reinforced the purpose of the Roundtable itself: creating meaningful conversations between generations that strengthen understanding and help shape the future.

Sarah Wilkinson (Online)

Sarah Wilkinson reminded the Roundtable that the influence of Section 28 reached well beyond education.

Reflecting on her own experiences, she described how the wider social climate influenced family life, parenting and the confidence with which LGBTQ+ people imagined their futures. The legislation formed part of a broader environment that shaped opportunities, aspirations and everyday decisions.

Her contribution broadened the discussion, encouraging participants to recognise that the legacy of Section 28 extended into many aspects of LGBTQ+ life, including relationships, family and belonging.

Sarah's reflections also demonstrated the value of hybrid participation. Although joining remotely, her contribution became an important part of the wider conversation, adding another lived experience to the collective understanding shared throughout the session.



Reflections

As the Roundtable ended, several themes had emerged consistently throughout the conversations.

Section 28 may belong to history, yet its lessons continue to resonate today. Contributors reflected on education, visibility, leadership, activism, family and community, each offering a different perspective on how legislation can shape lives long after it has been repealed.

The session also reinforced the importance of intergenerational dialogue. Those who experienced Section 28 first-hand shared memories that cannot be found in textbooks, while younger participants brought fresh perspectives and thoughtful questions that challenged everyone to think differently about the future.

Storytelling remained central throughout the Roundtable. Every contributor demonstrated that lived experience carries knowledge capable of informing policy, strengthening communities and inspiring future generations. Stories preserve history, create understanding and remind us that social change is ultimately about people.

Perhaps the strongest message to emerge from the session was that progress grows through collective effort. Every advance discussed throughout the Roundtable reflected communities working together, listening to one another and recognising that lasting change is built through relationships, courage and solidarity.

Building the next decade begins by understanding those who helped shape the last.



In Conversation

Lord Michael Cashman & Peter Tatchell

The Roundtable concluded with an in-conversation between Lord Michael Cashman and Peter Tatchell, two of the most influential figures in the campaign for LGBTQ+ equality in the United Kingdom. Their conversation offered not only a reflection on the campaign against Section 28, but a broader discussion about activism, solidarity and the responsibilities of every generation.

Although their approaches to campaigning often differed, the discussion revealed a shared commitment to advancing human rights and creating lasting social change.

Lord Michael Cashman reflected on the extraordinary sense of unity that emerged during the campaign against Section 28 and throughout the HIV epidemic. Faced with unprecedented challenges, organisations and individuals found common purpose, recognising that progress depended upon working together rather than in isolation.

One message resonated throughout his contribution. Rights are never permanent. Every generation inherits the responsibility to protect the freedoms secured by those who came before them.

He also reminded the audience that solidarity begins with standing up for one another. Communities become stronger when they recognise that every challenge affecting one part of the LGBTQ+ community ultimately affects everyone.

Peter Tatchell reflected on the importance of direct action throughout the campaign against Section 28. Alongside political engagement and legislative advocacy, public protest and visible activism played an essential role in creating awareness and sustaining momentum for change.

He encouraged participants to continue viewing LGBTQ+ equality within the wider context of universal human rights, recognising that the strongest movements build alliances across communities and causes. Progress, he suggested, has always depended upon people working together in pursuit of justice, equality and dignity.

Looking ahead, Peter reflected on the importance of remaining engaged in public life and continuing to challenge policies and narratives that restrict equality or diminish human rights.

Together, the conversation demonstrated that meaningful change is rarely achieved through a single approach. Dialogue, advocacy, community organising, political engagement and direct action have each played important roles in advancing LGBTQ+ equality. The discussion closed on a hopeful note, encouraging every generation to continue building on that legacy.



Continue the Conversation

Older Queer Voices believes conversations should lead to continued engagement and meaningful action.

The Roundtable highlighted the importance of preserving lived experiences while creating opportunities for future generations to learn from them. The conversations shared throughout the session will continue informing Older Queer Voices' work across podcasts, research, books, films, festivals and future Roundtables.

This report will be shared widely with participants, community organisations, educators, employers and policymakers, encouraging continued discussion around the legacy of Section 28 and its relevance today.

Older Queer Voices will continue creating spaces where intergenerational voices come together to share experiences, challenge ideas and shape the next decade for LGBTQ+ communities.

Key Reflections

Throughout the Roundtable, several themes emerged naturally from the conversations. Contributors returned repeatedly to the importance of visibility and the lasting influence of education in shaping lives, identities and opportunities.

They reflected on the value of representation; the strength found in community and the importance of preserving lived experiences before they are lost.

Storytelling was recognised as one of the most powerful ways of creating understanding, while listening across generations emerged as an essential part of strengthening our communities.

Although every contributor approached Section 28 through their own experiences and perspective, together they demonstrated that history has its greatest value when it continues to inform the future.



Conclusion

Building the Next Decade - Section 28 was never intended to be a conversation about the past alone. It brought together those who lived through one of the defining chapters in modern LGBTQ+ history with younger generations who are helping shape its future. Through stories, lived experiences and honest reflections, the Roundtable explored not only what happened during the years of Section 28, but what those experiences continue to teach us today.

Throughout the session, one message remained constant. Preserving LGBTQ+ history is about far more than recording events or remembering milestones. It is about listening to the people who lived them, understanding how those experiences shaped lives and ensuring that the knowledge gained continues to guide future generations. Storytelling emerged as one of the most powerful tools for creating understanding, strengthening communities and connecting generations.

As Older Queer Voices continues to grow, these conversations will remain at the heart of our work. Every story shared enriches our collective history, strengthens our community and helps shape the conversations, leadership and decisions that will define the next decade for LGBTQ+ people.



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Thank you Keith for also promoting the Roundtable through Coin Street's communications and social media, helping connect the event with its neighbourhood and communities across SE1. Our sincere thanks to Keith, Tara and the wider conference team for their generosity, partnership and commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming space.

Older Queer Voices extends its sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to **Building the Next Decade - Section 28**.

Our gratitude to **Lord Chris Smith** for his Welcome Address and to **Joseph Galliano-Doig MBE** for chairing the Roundtable with thoughtfulness, generosity and care.

Thank you to our contributors: **Lisa Power, Jonathan Blake, Jane Traies, Sarah Drummond, Robin Panrucker, Ray Carter, Claire Truscott, Ted Brown and Laïla El-Métoui and Nicola Fenton**, together with our online contributors **Charlie, Cheryl and Sarah Wilkinson**, whose perspectives enriched the conversation and ensured that voices beyond the room formed part of the discussion.

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Finally, thank you to everyone who joined us, in person and online. Your willingness to listen, share your experiences and contribute to the conversation made this Roundtable what it became. The discussions will continue through this report and, we hope, in many more conversations yet to come.