

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday 8th July 2021

Student celebrated nationally for using own experiences of LGBTQ+ bullying to build a safe and inclusive college community

The 17-year-old student, studying towards his A levels at Dudley College of Technology in the West Midlands, was named Queer Student of the Year at the live virtual final of the inaugural celebration of young queer talent on 1 July. The Queer Student Awards (QSA) recognise the talented students in the U.K. identifying as LGBTQ+ who are proudly leading in their lives, and the communities around them.

Jack Stokes was bullied, harassed, and attacked for being himself, and chose to openly share these stories before being elected to lead Dudley Student's Union LGBTQ+ Support, Friendship and Activist group – quickly becoming an inclusive community for the LGBTQ+ students at Dudley College. Jack's story impressed judges, where he had used his own experiences of LGBTQ+ bullying in the local community and the isolation he suffered, to build a safe and inclusive space in his college where young people can feel supported no matter how they chose to identify. The group he leads has caught the attention of the National Union of Students, created links with local charities and raised a motion to add a transgender officer to the college's student executive leadership team.

Accepting his award Jack commented *"I am so honoured to have been named the Queer Student of the Year, and I'd like to thank the judges for this opportunity and Dudley SU for nominating and supporting me. We must be at the forefront of our own narrative and refuse to be defined by those who only embody hate and bigotry. I want to be a strong voice standing up for LGBTQ+ youth, and I will not let silence be all they hear. Loud and proud, always!"*

The pandemic has led to the temporary, and in some cases permanent, closure of many clubs, bars and community spaces which can often serve as a vital service, and place for queer people to meet safely. Verbal abuse and instances of violence towards the LGBTQ+ community are increasingly globally, with many students left feeling vulnerable with a negative impact upon their mental health. Jack's story shows the importance of safe spaces for queer people and building communities where young people can support each other.

Dudley College of Technology Student Development Officer, Sophia Daly nominated him. *"Jack is a phenomenal young man whom it has been my privilege to support over the past year. His dedication to the Dudley College queer student community has been inspirational and the whole college has benefited by his perseverance. Educational institutions should always act as safe and progressive spaces where everyone's voice is valued, and this is certainly what we endeavour at Dudley. We are inspired and it has been our pleasure to have been Jack's wholehearted advocate."*

The QSAs also recognised the fantastic work that other young people have focused their attention towards in the last twelve months with nine other winners announced during the evening, and £1,106.84 was raised for charity partner Diversity Role Models. Learn more about the Queer Student Awards and discover all the winners celebrated at thequeerstudentawards.co.uk. Contact Steve Keith steve@thebrandingman.co.uk for further comment.

About the QSAs

Judged by a panel of student recruitment industry experts, queer influencers and young people from schools, colleges and universities, the Queer Student Awards hopes to become an annual celebration recognising talented LGBTQ+ students who are proudly leading in their lives and the communities around them. The awards provide a space to show commitments being made towards positively addressing the adversities that queer youths still experience every day, especially when it comes to navigating their career options and worrying about whether their sexuality will act as a barrier to their future success. The awards also showcase the work being done in education and by employers to create inclusive, and safe spaces for young LGBTQ+ people that support them in their transition into the workplace.

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