

Speech: Uruguay commemorates IDAHOBIT

Friday 17 May is the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT in English). I know that every day we seem to celebrate something internationally and we probably all get tired of the “Feliz dia de...” messages that get circulated on social media.

I think of 17 May as a day to celebrate and promote diversity. But why does diversity matter? Well, not only is equal treatment a fundamental principle for human rights, but it also has an economic impact for your business. There have been numerous studies in the UK showing that workplaces which actively promote diversity, enjoy higher levels of employee satisfaction, productivity and profitability. In short, companies with a diverse workforce, prosper better than those without one.

Why does this happen? Well, as an employer, if you want to get the best out of your employees you need to offer a workplace where everyone can contribute in full. That means a workplace where people do not have to hide a part of themselves. A environment where colleagues can work safe in the knowledge that they will be evaluated on their performance and not their background, race, gender or orientation.

Companies with a diverse workforce have also been shown to be more resilient and innovative. Why? Well, having a diverse workforce also encourages diversity of thought. Companies that thrive today are those who are willing to innovate, take risks and change. If you only recruit one “type” of person, you may not truly benefit from the widest range of opinions, ideas and creativity. Instead you end up reinforcing “group think”, with a privileged inner circle taking all the strategic decisions, but limiting themselves to a single point of view. Over the longer-term, that’s a dangerous place for any business.

I’m really conscious to not recruit “in my own image”. I want colleagues with a diverse range of ideas and experiences in the British Embassy. In practice that means ensuring all our jobs are published and truly open to competition and that interview panels are made up of colleagues with a range of views. Similarly, when we host events at the Embassy, we want to invite guests who represent all of Uruguay, in all its diversity.

As the first openly gay British Ambassador in Uruguay, when I finish my time here, I wanted to be remembered as the Ambassador who was open, professional and represented the UK to the best of his abilities. I do not want to be remembered as the “gay” Ambassador. On this special day for the LGBT community, we are not asking for special treatment, but a chance to prove that we can do the job as well as others.