The 100 most influential LGBT people of the year

From actors to Labour peers, the diverse nature of the leading LGBT campaigners should be a source of celebration for the community, says Lucy Jolin

1. Jane Lynch  Actor
   It was an US TV comedy series Glew’s ruthless, breathtaking equal leader Sue Sylvester: “Had my tear ducts removed. Didn’t ‘ca n’t – that award-winning US actor, comedian and author Jane Lynch showed her way into the affections of millions worldwide. The role crumpled a 25-year career that has taken improvised comedy, film, TV, theatre and writing. She has never about away from her sexuality, everying psychologist Lore Ehrlich in 2013 and is a vocal advocate for gay rights. “Life is in a big old fashioned impression,” she told students at Smith College this year. “Embrace the ever-changing, ever-existing world with the best role I’ve ever found. Say ‘Yes, and ...’”

2. Lord Alli Labour peer and entrepreneur
   Media entrepreneur, businessman and both the youngest and the first openly gay peer in the House of Lords, Waheed Alli works for gay rights at the highest levels. Leaving school at 16, his drive has taken him from being a £40-a-week researcher on a magazine to co-founding Planet 24, which went on to make some of Channel 4’s best-loved programmes. He was instrumental in both the lowering of the age of consent for gay sex from 18 to 16 and the repeal of Section 28, which forbade the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities. He continues to campaign for improved gay rights worldwide.

3. Gok Wan TV presenter
   Few British TV personalities are as universally recognized and loved as Gok Wan. Shy and unshaven as a child and now passionate about having a healthy body image, he found his calling in fashion styling. It was his weight, bullying and knowledge on TV series How To Look Good Naked that first catapulted him to fame. He has written a number of fashion books, designed his own range of spectacles and presented numerous TV shows, including Too Fat Too Young, a programme that examined childhood obesity. And in his spare time - of which there isn’t much - he supports numerous charities, including hosting the Stonewall Awards.

4. Barney Frank US politician
   Not many US politicians have been as courageous as to come out. Democratic congressman Barney Frank is one of the few - in fact, he was the first member of Congress to admit his sexuality voluntarily. He is a champion of civil rights, including LGBT rights, and in 1998 he founded the National Stonewall Democrats, the first national Democratic LGBT organisation, to the near future he plans to marry his partner, Jim Ready: “I’m used to being in the minority,” he told at an interview in 1998. “I’m a left-handed gay Jew. I’ve never felt, automatically, a member of any majority.”

5. Tammy Baldwin US politician
   Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin has chosen to ignore those she calls “the nay-sayers, the cynics, and the keepers of the status quo.” Those who say “you can’t, you shouldn’t, or you aren’t.” Her career is a perfect illustration of that philosophy. She’s a forceful champion of equal rights, clean energy and universal healthcare and is the first non-incumbent, openly gay person to serve in Congress. Along with Barney Frank, she established the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus in the US House of Representatives in June 2000, which works for the rights of LGBT people in the US and around the world.

6. Tim Cook chief executive of Apple
   Following Steve Jobs as CEO of Apple, one of the world’s most valuable companies, was always going to be tough. But Cook is putting his stamp on the company. The son of a shipyard worker, he worked at Compaq and IBM before arriving at Apple to become its chief operating officer and is credited with helping to turn a once-ailing company into the £500bn powerhouse it is today. As he recently told a technology conference: “We’re always focused on the future. We don’t sit and think about great things that were yesterday. I don’t think that is the thing that drives us all forward.”

7. Sir Ian McKellen Actor
   His roles in blockbuster films have made McKellen a global superstar. But he’s also known as one of the most charismatic actors working in film, TV and theatre, rising from humble beginnings in Barry to the heights of his profession. He came out in 1988 – during a Radio 3 discussion on Sex in Section 28 – and from that moment has brought all his star power to bear on the cause of equality, co-founding Stonewall and regularly speaking and writing on gay issues.

8. Ellen DeGeneres Actor
   Multi Emmy-awarded winning actress, writer, stand-up comedian and talkshow host, DeGeneres chose to make her synonymous sitcom mirror her life when her character came out to her therapist. “If they found out I was gay, maybe they wouldn’t applaud,” she reflected later. “Maybe they wouldn’t laugh. Maye they wouldn’t like me if they knew that I was gay.” She had no need to worry – people laughed. She has since spoken out against prejudice and bullying and last year was named a special envoy for global Aids awareness.

9. Martina Navratilova Former tennis player
   Navratilova is also a shining exception in the world of competitive sport, where many spectators and women still feel unable to come out. Since 1981 she’s been open about her lesbianism and has spoken out repeatedly on behalf of LGBT rights. In short, she’s an inspiration to young gay sportspersons around the globe.

10. Clare Balding Sports presenter
   A familiar face on UK screens, Balding is one of the BBC’s best-loved and knowledgeable sport presenters. But she’s also a champion in her own right - before she moved into media, she was a leading amateur flat jockey. How she found all the BBC’s live racing coverage, including Royal Ascot and the Derby. In 2009 she entered into a civil partnership with radio presenter Alice Arnold. As she told the Radio Times last year: “Personally, I’m a much better broadcaster for not hiding who I am. Not necessarily trusting it, but not hiding it.”