

Call for evidence

The role of the GEO: embedding equalities across Government

Executive summary

1. Introduction

Who we are, why we exist and what are our key concerns

- 1.1 This submission is made by LGB Alliance. LGB Alliance is a group representing thousands of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who share grave concerns about the loss of our rights. If you have any questions regarding our response, we can be reached at info@lgballiance.org.uk
- 1.2 We are particularly troubled by the drive to replace, in law and in wider public usage, the word “sex” (meaning biological sex) with “gender identity” or “gender expression”. Eliminating the word “sex” has the effect of erasing homosexuality. We are long-time gay and lesbian activists who fought for the rights of people with a same-sex sexual orientation. We are alarmed to see these rights being eroded.

The structure and function of the GEO and its location in the Cabinet Office: how effectively does this enable it to support cross-departmental work on equalities, including the collection and analysis of equalities data?

2. GEO as the “unwanted orphan”

- 2.1 Aside from a brief period from 2007-2010 when it was an independent department, the GEO has been moved around between several Government Departments in Whitehall. It has been moved from the Home Office to DCMS to DfE to DfID and most recently to the Cabinet Office.
- 2.2 These frequent moves have undermined the effectiveness of GEO. The damaging effects of constant moves are highlighted in the inquiry into “The role of Minister for Women and Equalities and the place of GEO in government”
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/356/35604.htm>
- 2.3 One serious concern is that civil servants who do not have dedicated GEO roles within Cabinet Office may lack the opportunity to become subject-matter experts. They may be called on at any time to work on other, entirely unrelated, issues.

3. The shift to the Cabinet Office

- 3.1 This latest move does make sense, in that this is a cross-departmental Office. However, LGB Alliance believes there is a need to “ring-fence” Ministers and staff, if GEO is to achieve the ambitious targets that are laid out in the 2019/20 Strategic Plan. In this Plan, GEO states:

- 3.1.1 *“From our new permanent home at the heart of government we will help to better articulate and co-ordinate a national mission to help everyone to tackle inequality. Working alongside the Race Disparity Unit, the new cross-cutting Disability Unit and others, we will be part of an Equalities Hub for all parts of central government and beyond”.*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814357/GEO_Strategic_Plan_080519_.pdf

4. Cabinet Office’s membership of Stonewall’s Diversity Champions Scheme.

- 4.1 A “national mission” needs a joined-up approach to develop evidence-based equalities policy. It is the view of LGB Alliance that although the new location of GEO is sensible and potentially useful, Cabinet Office will be unable to either support cross-departmental work on equalities, or to collect and analyse equalities data in a fair and balanced way, while it remains a member of Stonewall Diversity Champions Scheme.

5. Problems arising from membership of Stonewall’s Diversity Champions Scheme

- 5.1 In 2010 David Cameron referred to lobby groups as “the next big scandal waiting to happen.” While the right of citizens to lobby is crucial to a functioning democracy, the power of large, well-funded and pervasive lobby groups can become a threat to democracy.
- 5.2 There is a direct conflict of interest between Stonewall and the work of the GEO. In 2015, in evidence to the Women and Equalities Select Committee, the then CEO, now Baroness Ruth Hunt requested:
- 5.3 A review of the Equality Act 2010 to include ‘gender identity’ rather than ‘gender reassignment’ as a protected characteristic and to remove exemptions, such as access to single-sex spaces <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/women-and-equalities-select-committee-inquiry-transgender-equality>
- 5.4 While there is nothing wrong with a lobby group making recommendations, which run counter to government policy, Stonewall adopts a unique position, in that as a gender identity lobby group it refuses to countenance any discussion of its views. Any disagreement is regarded as beyond the pale and therefore rejected under the tag line “no debate”.

6. Changes in Stonewall's position since 2015

- 6.1 Until 2015, Stonewall was a highly-regarded charity that promoted gay and lesbian rights. It achieved a great deal and was a powerful force for good. In 2015, Stonewall abandoned this role. Instead, it now promotes the belief that everyone has a gender identity which overrides the importance of biological sex. Astonishingly, it has moved so far from its original calling that within Stonewall's world view we find persons with same-sex sexual orientation described as "transphobic". The meaning of "trans" remains unclear, since Stonewall's website lists 17 possible ways of being "trans", and promotes the notion that everyone should be allowed to self-identify as the opposite sex without making any changes to their body.
- 6.2 In addition, Stonewall has invested heavily in the promotion of reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to allow gender self-ID. When this reform was rejected by Liz Truss, Secretary of State for International Trade and Minister for Women and Equalities, in September 2020, Nancy Kelley, current CEO of Stonewall said:

'Today, the UK Government has fallen far short on its promise to reform the Gender Recognition Act and has missed a key opportunity to progress LGBT equality.'

'It's a shocking failure in leadership that after three years and a robust public consultation, the UK Government has put forward only minimal administrative changes to improve the process for legal gender recognition of trans people in England and Wales'

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/stonewall-statement-gender-recognition-act-reform>

Clearly, then, Stonewall is disappointed with the Government's stated policy. It seeks to change it.

7. Influence exerted through the Diversity Champions Scheme

- 7.1 By participating in the Stonewall Diversity Champions scheme, the Cabinet Office cannot discharge its duties effectively. Stonewall has been shown to seek to impose its own preference for self-ID as if this were the law, thus confusing numerous public and private bodies to which it provides training. It teaches self-ID instead of teaching the Equality Act 2010. This in itself should raise alarm bells in a Government Department.
- 7.2 Stonewall conflates the terms *sex* and *gender*. One consequence of this is to interfere with the effective collection of data – the conflation of *sex* and *gender*

Written evidence submitted by LGB Alliance [GEO0036]

means that the data on sex – essential to policy-making on issues relating to women and girls, and to LGB people – may be badly distorted.

- 7.3 Stonewall has been shown to exert influence on public and private bodies to comply with its requirements. Compliance with Stonewall's requirements runs counter to the intentions of the Equality Act 2010, Government policy, and the stated aims of the GEO.

See Naomi Cunningham's paper for Legal Feminist about how Diversity Champions scheme works. <https://legalfeminist.org.uk/2021/02/01/submission-and-compliance/>
See also the written judgement in the recent preliminary hearing on the Allison Bailey Employment Tribunal case. <https://allisonbailey.co.uk/updates/update-4/>

- 7.4 For the above reasons, LGB Alliance recommends that the Cabinet Office separate itself from this scheme for as long as it hosts GEO – and probably beyond.

8. The GEO's role in supporting compliance with international obligations including the UN Conventions and Sustainable Development Goals

- 8.1. GEO should certainly support compliance with international obligations. However, we should point out that a misunderstanding has arisen and is indeed being promoted at international level, regarding the words *sex* and *gender*. The conflation of these words, whether or not intentional, is deeply damaging to LGB people and to gender non-conforming children.
- 8.2 Related to this is a global "capture" of major institutions, including many parts of the United Nations, by activist groups who promote the notion of gender identity as if it were a real, tangible innate human attribute, conflating it with the actual innate human attribute that is biological sex.

9. UN Conventions

- 9.1 LGB Alliance is lobbying at UN level in two areas – one with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and second with the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.
- 9.2 It is unfortunate that neither is aware that there is a counter-narrative to the views expressed by LGBTQI+ groups and that many LGB people reject concepts such as "gender identity" or "trans children". LGB Alliance now has 15 groups worldwide (none of which receives any funding from the public purse or from any organisation whatsoever). Many of them will be lobbying at UN level to redress the balance towards facts in policymaking.
- 9.3 Another alarming development relates to moves in many countries to ban all discussion of gender identity theory as "hate speech". It is the duty of GEO to stand up for the rights of all to be given an opportunity to express their ideas, whether or not some people are offended by these ideas. In 2021, statements of

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biological fact, for example that sex is immutable, is considered by all social media companies, and some countries, as “hate speech”. GEO should have staff with the right skills and training to be able to push back on this.

10 . Sustainable Development Goals

- 10.1 It is unfortunate that in the EHRC’s publication Protecting Human Rights: key challenges for the UK’s third Universal Periodic Review, 22 Sep 2016, the EHRC misrepresented the protected characteristics.

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/protecting-human-rights-uk-third-universal-periodic-review-december-2016.pdf>

Sex was misquoted as *gender*, and *gender reassignment* as *transgender status*. It is a matter of concern not only that this was allowed to slip through, but also that these two changes reflect precisely the aims pursued by gender identity lobby groups like Stonewall. It is therefore essential that GEO includes groups like LGB Alliance in efforts to support its work at national and international level.

- 10.2 Under Strategic Objective 1 of GEO’s Strategic Plan 2019/20, we see item 3b): “Delivering an international conference on LGBT issues around the world, in partnership with DFID and FCO”.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814357/GEO_Strategic_Plan_080519_.pdf
- 10.3 Since first making contact with GEO in early 2020, LGB Alliance has repeatedly asked to be involved in this international conference. Our understanding is that FCO, DFID & GEO are working on the conference with gender identity lobby groups Stonewall and Kaleidoscope. Both these groups subscribe to a narrow ideology which is in itself damaging to LGB people. It is therefore important that the UK is represented by other LGB voices who stand up for evidence-based policy and open, respectful discussion.

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