

## Scottish Government - Views on 'End Conversion Therapy' Petition

### **I What are your views on the action called for in the petition?**

#### **Please provide your response in the box provided.:**

We have no objection to banning conversion therapy in relation to sexual orientation. To the best of our belief, there is now very little such conversion therapy going on in the UK, outside some small religious groups, and it must be discontinued as harmful, pointless and deeply prejudiced. Some people argue that it should be permitted where the lesbian or gay man themselves requests it; we entirely disagree, as such requests indicate an internalised homophobia that may have resulted from bullying, harassment and unpleasant attitudes in the milieu where this individual is, be that family, religious group or any other context.

However, the conflation of sexual orientation and gender identity makes such a legal ban highly contentious. The petition moves from outlining the reality of lesbian and gay conversion therapy to reference to gender identity, with a sleight of hand worthy of a magician. No explanation is provided of what is meant by conversion therapy in relation to gender identity, but segues straight into accusations of 'anti-trans rhetoric' and 'hate groups', implying something entirely 'horrific' regarding what is being seen (although not explained at all) as gender identity conversion therapy.

Unfortunately, we know only too well what is being referenced. The need for proper professional psychotherapy – neutral, facilitating exploration – is frequently cited in relation to those identifying as transgender, particularly children and young people. Such psychotherapy is of very great importance for anyone embarking on any major life change, and most particularly the irreversible medications and surgery to which such a course is likely to lead. However, according to those like the petitioners who see Liz Truss's measured response as 'anti-trans rhetoric', any work with those considering 'gender transition' which is not immediate affirmation and encouragement to embark/continue on this course is 'conversion therapy'.

Quite the opposite is in fact true. As practitioners at the Tavistock Gender Identity Development Service themselves said, it seemed at times as if the affirmation of children and young people itself was conversion therapy – of possibly lesbian and gay young people to a trans identity.

That comes alongside evidence from practitioners to the High Court in the case taken by Keira Bell and Mrs A against the Tavistock that there was clear evidence of trauma, sexual abuse, other mental problems and autism – all of which was ignored with the focus solely on the affirmation of a transgender identity and treatment. See report by Lucy Bannerman in the Times of 5 December 2020 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tavistock-clinic-judges-could-not-get-data-about-gender-treatment-783z5d9x8>

It surely cannot be denied that these children and young people need good and effective psychotherapy, designed to support them as they explore their feelings and ideas. Immediate affirmation and social transition (which makes it much harder for someone, adult let alone a child, to change their mind) have the potential to inflict lasting damage. Psychotherapy is not conversion therapy; it is essential to ensure the mental and physical health of the individual.

## **2 What action would you like to see the Scottish Government take, within the powers available to it?**

**Please provide the reasons for your answer in this text box. :**

From what has been said in response to Question 1, it is clear that the most important thing that the Scottish Government can do is develop much better mental health provision, with appropriate psychotherapy, neutral and exploratory. No child, young person or adult expressing a wish to transition or any sort of confusion about their 'gender' should be abandoned to a 'one size fits all' pathway of inevitable and permanent transition.

To label such psychotherapy as 'conversion therapy', and groups supporting such an approach as 'transphobic' and 'hate groups' is to do a terrible disservice to any individual contemplating any form of gender 'change'. Developing a genuinely neutral, facilitative, and well-trained group of psychotherapists, available in all parts of the country, is an obvious necessity.

There needs to be a survey of current practice in relation to sexual orientation conversion therapy, where it is occurring and what might ensure its end. It may be that, if it is largely among small religious groups, a legal ban would have little or no impact. There may be better ways to ensure that such groups do not inflict such unpleasant and counter-productive practices on people – not least, a clear route for anyone wishing to escape from such small groups, some of which would rightly be termed 'cults'. Creating, for example, a helpline with back-up psychotherapy and 'safe houses' might be far more effective in actually making such 'conversion therapy' a thing of the past.

## **3 Do you have suggestions on how the Committee can take forward its consideration of the petition?**

**Please enter your response in the text box provided. :**

Among the groups that must be consulted are:

LGB Alliance Scotland <https://lgballiance.org.uk/scotland/>

Thoughtful Therapists <https://thoughtfultherapists.org/>

Lesbian Labour <https://lesbianlabour.com/>

ForwomenScotland <https://forwomen.scot/>

SNP Women's Pledge <http://www.snpwomenspledge.com/about/>

Labour Women's Declaration <https://labourwomensdeclaration.org.uk/>

