

LGB ALLIANCE
SUBMISSION TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE INQUIRY
“TECH AND THE FUTURE OF UK FOREIGN POLICY”

Background

1. LGB Alliance was formed in October 2019 in response to the refusal of Stonewall, once itself an LGB rights campaigning organisation, to engage in any discussion on issues of sex and gender and how they relate to LGB people. Specifically, this includes challenging the notion that everyone has a gender identity, which must take precedence over biological sex.
2. Our main areas of interest are the human rights of LGB people, fact-based education of children and young people and the creation of a positive environment for all "gender non-conforming" people in the UK. LGB Alliance believes that “gender identity theory” reinforces outdated and regressive stereotypes. We would like to see a world where any boy or girl, man or woman, can dress and be whoever they would like to be as long as they respect the rights of others.
3. Most broadcasters and print media avoid these issues. Many tell us they do so because they can’t face the inevitable backlash from gender ideology activists. We therefore rely on Twitter, newsletters and webinars to disseminate our views. Fifteen LGB Alliances have now been established worldwide, from Brazil to Australia – and in the UK we now have over 33k followers on Twitter.

Our issue

4. UK political discourse is increasingly conducted on large foreign-owned and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and this trend has accelerated due to lockdown when physical meetings were not possible. These online platforms are starting to become the public square where political ideas are discussed, individuals’ views are aired and potential unintended consequences of proposed changes in the law are raised and examined. As more Government depts, public bodies, political parties, politicians and journalists use these platforms to communicate, it becomes ever more important that everyone has access to join the debate.
5. Despite their important role in our democracy, these platforms are not overseen by UK authorities. The providers of these platforms – privately owned foreign tech companies – have significant power to shape and direct discussions that form part of our democratic processes. This is done through their access and moderation policies. This is extremely concerning, for example in the case of Twitter, where guidelines written and enforced by the corporation based in California dictate who may / may not take part in a public debate on UK laws.
6. Under these guidelines, accounts can be, and frequently are, permanently withdrawn, with no effective right of appeal. In contrast, many death and rape threats are allowed to stand. Even if accounts are not withdrawn, many users become afraid to discuss issues, preferring to self-censor and remain silent for fear of being banned. This has a chilling effect on their freedom – under UK law – to express legitimate views. This impacts women (including lesbians) disproportionately as studies have shown that they are subject to far greater levels of online threats and intimidation.
7. Those brave individuals who do persevere are left unable to use clear and straightforward language in their attempts to circumnavigate the Twitter corporate policing. This has the

effect of hindering discussion of these issues. Being forced to use less clear language also excludes many people in the UK with lower literacy levels from the discussion.

8. A case in point is the discussion on proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act and their potential implications and related court cases that are in the news. This discussion is part of the basic democratic process. Unacceptably, through the actions of the Twitter corporation, women (and disproportionately lesbians) are being excluded from this process having lost access to the digital public square where these potential future changes in laws affecting their rights are being discussed.
9. The recent Maya Forstater case established that the absence of belief in gender ideology is protected under the UK Equality Act (2010). It is therefore unacceptable for UK users of Twitter and Facebook to be thrown off the digital public square through the implementation of guidelines and enforcement policies designed in California by gender ideology supporting technology giants.

10. [Could add a Para about the arbitrary loss of 'blue tick']

11. This stifling of debate can also have real-life implications and cause harms. It has prevented the legitimate concerns about the irreversible treatment pathways that gender-confused children are being put on, from being listened to and acted on in a timely manner. This has the potential to have led to the needless medicalisation of children. We are seeing an increasing number of detransitioners who would have been saved a lot of anguish had there not been such a concerted effort to silence this debate.

Conclusion

12. The present situation demonstrates the power of large global social media corporations to control national policy debates across international borders by effectively silencing one side of the debate and thereby interfering with the public discussions that are central to the democratic process. This is not acceptable to us and should not be acceptable to any democratic society.
13. We believe that the FCO should pursue international discussions to highlight and address this issue in the relevant international fora. It is not acceptable for national policy discussions across the world to be conducted within the very tight framework dictated by the values of Californian technology giants, particularly where they appear to be pursuing a particular agenda – in the case set out in our submission relating to gender ideology.
14. In parallel, we consider that the appropriate UK regulatory authorities need to establish effective UK processes to mitigate the corporations' powers and ensure fair access to the digital public square based on UK equality legislation. Examples of specific actions to explore include:
 - Establishing an appeals process based in the UK and based on UK laws where users can get their accounts re-instated should they be withdrawn for reasons that are incompatible with UK law.
 - Preventing politicians, public servants/bodies and 3rd sector organisations that are in receipt of public funding from using certain social media platform features like "blocking" accounts to avoid seeing posts they do not agree with even where they ask legitimate questions in a respectful manner.

