

LGBTI+ Cross-Party Group

Tuesday 25th January, 6pm

Meeting hosted online via Zoom

Present

MSPs:

Jamie Greene MSP (Co-convener)
Emma Roddick MSP (Co-convener)
Alexander Stewart MSP
Joe FitzPatrick MSP
Karen Adam MSP
Paul O’Kane MSP
Paul McLennan MSP

Organisational members

Rebecca Crowther – Equality Network
Vic Valentine - Scottish Trans
Tim Hopkins – Equality Network
Eleanor Sanders White – Equality Network
Oceana Maund - Scottish Trans
Megan Snedden – Stonewall Scotland
Colin Macfarlane – Stonewall Scotland
Paul Daly or Sarah Anderson – LGBT Youth Scotland
Maruska Greenwood and Rebecca Hoffman – LGBT Health and Wellbeing
Jordan Daly - Time for Inclusive Education
Liam Stevenson - Time for Inclusive Education
Nik James – NASUWT
Tristan Gray – End Conversion Therapy
Blair Anderson - End Conversion Therapy
Emma Cuthbertson - Gender Inclusion Network
Dom Millar Graham – Our Story Scotland
Matt Dabrowski – Out Scotland

Individual members

Fiona Donaldson Grounds
Heather Herbert
Kevin Guyan
Stevie Maybanks
Ruth Ann McCalla – SNP BAME Network LGBT Officer
Alice Mallinson – Edinburgh Children’s Hospital Charity

Apologies

Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP
Katy Clark MSP
Kenny Stewart - Equality and Human Rights Commission
Jill Wood – Engender
Iain Campbell – Dumfries and Galloway LGBT Plus

1. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting

Members approved the minutes from the previous meeting.

2. Welcome and introductions

Jamie Greene MSP welcomed everyone to this CPG, noting the possibility of an in-person meeting next time, but with a hybrid digital element so some members could still attend remotely. Jamie and the Equality Network noted the importance of ensuring that CPG discussions and purposes mapped on to current and future legislative developments in LGBTI equality, marrying up timelines of CPG discussions with the work of government. In relation to this, the focus of this CPG was stated to be:

- Developments in work to end conversion therapy
- Developments in work to reform the Gender Recognition Act
- Developments in gender identity services policy

3. Ending Conversion Therapy

Blair Anderson of End Conversion Therapy provided a brief update on developments with the End Conversion Therapy campaign. He noted that this began with a petition, lodged in 2020, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ban the provision or promotion of LGBT+ conversion therapy in Scotland. Blair explained how

this was then referred to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee (now the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee), who have been gathering evidence from a range of key stakeholders and experts, including survivors.

Blair noted that the Committee's report on this petition had been published today (<https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/Committees/Report/EHRCJ/2022/1/25/8c18e05c-08ab-4c7d-992b-4b0467541d70>). Blair particularly welcomed its recommendations for a comprehensive ban enacted swiftly, covering both sexual orientation and gender identity, applicable in all settings, for both adults and children, and with the acknowledgement that 'consent' could not be used as a defence. Blair gave thanks to the many survivors and contributors who gave evidence to the Committee, and highlighted the importance of this work personally, as a survivor of conversion therapy himself. Blair mentioned that the next steps were already underway, including the setting up of an Expert Advisory Group with the function of helping to shape upcoming legislation.

Joe FitzPatrick MSP responded to Blair's summary, thanking everyone who had given evidence to the Committee and helped with this process, including the powerful testimonies given by survivors. Joe explained that it was a unanimous decision to take forward legislation on ending conversion practices. Joe highlighted that not re-traumatising survivors should be the priority and that this would need to be considered as legislation progressed (for example in the Expert Advisory Group).

Jamie Greene responded to Joe's comments, acknowledging the need to talk to those most affected by conversion practices to ensure that any legislation was watertight and not immediately challenged in courts, while balancing this with handling such topics sensitively in order that everyone's concerns be addressed, even if there may be conflicting points of view, for example by ensuring that the concerns of religious groups around religious freedoms are taken on board.

Blair responded to Jamie's comments, stating that these were very important concerns, particularly reaching out to diverse faiths and ensuring that they have input, as well as making sure that faith groups

and other actors can be part of the conversation. Blair highlighted that many religious groups and people are supportive of the ban, and that there are many LGBTI people of faith too.

Rebecca Crowther of the Equality Network suggested a letter from the LGBTI CPG welcoming the EHRCJ Committee's recommendations on the next steps towards ending conversion practices in Scotland. Jamie Greene was in agreement that a letter could be drafted, and that this could also be signed by MSPs, but that this would need to be carefully formulated so that everyone from the CPG could be in agreement about its contents.

Paul O'Kane MSP commented on the importance of the topic of conversion practices, stating that he was an LGBTI person of faith himself. Paul highlighted the powerful testimony that had been given by Jayne Ozanne to the EHRCJ Committee regarding the End Conversion Therapy petition. Paul mentioned that there was a need to make sure that everyone has access to evidence around the topic of conversion practices, to ensure that it is understood, and to explain why it is an important issue. There was a suggestion that the videos recorded as part of the evidence gathering done by the EHRCJ Committee could be distributed to MSPs. Jamie Greene responded to Paul's points, suggesting that this could be taken further by doing a 'what it is and what it is not' briefing on conversion practices. Blair Anderson agreed to feed in evidence and information via the Equality Network to combat myths and misconceptions around conversion practices.

4. Reform to the Gender Recognition Act

Vic Valentine of Scottish Trans presented a brief update on reforms to the Gender Recognition Act 2004. Vic stated that no date had yet been set as to when the draft legislation would be published but that this would likely be in the upcoming months. Vic noted that reform had been a long and difficult process and that showing support for the reforms would be important. Vic mentioned that Scottish Trans are looking for volunteers to help with this work.

Jamie responded to Vic's summary, reiterating that reform of the Gender Recognition Act had been a long process and stating that it was crucial that we identify the problems we are trying to fix, combatting

misinformation, for example, around 'Self-ID'. Jamie suggested that MSPs directly contact Vic to be able to ask questions or raise concerns around reform of the Act.

Colin Macfarlane of Stonewall Scotland noted that it was important that people know that if they are uncertain, they can have conversations with Stonewall Scotland and the other LGBTI groups in Scotland, and that these organisations can meet people where they are. Colin further stated that it was important to have conversations around this and to do this positively and respectfully.

Jamie Greene explained that not everyone has met with trans people, and that communication is key, noting that LGBTI people are not a homogenous group, with many different viewpoints, and that there are questions around how to approach the debate given the current toxicity around reform of the GRA and how normalised this toxicity has become.

Tim Hopkins of the Equality Network agreed that respectful communication is key and further noted the importance of positive and respectful conversations, even when things get tough.

Tristan Gray of End Conversion Therapy noted that it was common for interviewers to now ask about GRA reform in unrelated conversations and asked members if they had any advice around how to handle this. Several group members offered advice, stating that it was important to stick to factual elements and that it was ok to say that it is not your area of expertise and that this is not what you were invited to speak about.

Jordan Daly of Time For Inclusive Education raised a concern that he was seeing a resurgence of Section 28 style rhetoric around inclusive education and that he was concerned about Local Authority elections in May being used as a point to push forward anti-LGBTI views. Members noted that there needs to do more fact-checking of what is coming out of Parliament and pushback around misinformation.

Jamie Greene also reiterated the importance of respectful conversation, and of engaging with MSPs and individuals, and suggested writing to individual MSPs should they have misconceptions around a topic. Jamie provided an example of how Time For Inclusive Education championed this approach, changing minds through slow and steady work, speaking with many different people with diverse perspectives.

5. Gender Identity Services

Vic Valentine introduced this agenda item, providing a short synopsis of the current situation with regard to Gender Identity Services. Vic spoke about the development of a new NHS Strategic Action Framework for these services, but noted that this was just a roadmap for improvements so far. Vic raised concerns that the NHS is currently forecasting a 44 month wait for a first appointment at Sandyford, more than three and a half years. Vic highlighted potential opportunities for trans people to be involved going forward and the value of trans people in shaping this work. Vic offered their contact details for those who would like to keep in touch about this opportunity.

Jamie Greene responded, noting that 44 months is a shocking wait, even given delays as a result of Covid-19, and asked whether there was anything that could be done during that waiting period, for example, signposting to third sector organisations. Vic replied, explaining that options for signposting are limited as this cannot be holistic and what was needed was services. Vic mentioned that there was nothing to bridge the gap whilst waiting for services other than support from LGBTI organisations, such as LGBT Youth or LGBT Health & Wellbeing.

6. Questions to Parliament

Jamie Greene introduced this item, explaining that there were different ways that members could speak to MSPs through the group, including asking MSPs to ask questions of the government. Jamie stated that members could speak to MSPs within the CPG about what they would like to know, and MSPs could then help them formulate a question. Rebecca Crowther noted that members could also get in touch with the Equality Network for support on formulating questions.

Paul O'Kane noted that as a CPG it would be helpful if we could track responses to questions and asked if the secretariat (Equality Network) could keep a note of this, suggesting this was made into a shareable document. Karen Adam MSP mentioned that it was also possible for MSP members of the CPG to use SPICE (Scottish Parliament Information Centre) and highlighted that this was an under-used resource. Paul McLennan offered to help to get the message out around the topics discussed in this CPG, stating that it should be the

responsibility of CPG MSPs to educate their parties on these issues. Paul also noted the importance of cross-party lobbying.

7. Requests to join the LGBTI CPG

Rebecca Crowther stated that there had been five new requests to join the CPG. These were:

- Paul Behrens (individual)
- LGBT Unity (organisation)
- Terrence Higgins Trust (organisation)
- Scottish Bi+ Network (organisation)
- For Women. Scotland (organisation)

The convener asked members (33 present) if there was support for these membership requests. The requests from Paul Behrens, LGBT Unity, the Terrence Higgins Trust and the Scottish Bi+ Network were supported by all members.

No members supported the request from For Women. Scotland.

8. Any Other Business

Forthcoming CPG meetings were discussed. It was agreed that the focus should be what was happening in government and parliament. A date around 26th April was suggested to coincide with forthcoming legislation. It was suggested that this meeting look at the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill and that a productive format could be a 'trans 101' session, with MSPs invited along and able to ask questions.