

Core Issues Trust: A Response to the UK Government's Proposed Ban on "Conversion Therapy"

Paper submitted to the OSCE by *Core Issues Trust*¹

[Thursday 13th September, Working Session 6 "Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including combating anti-Semitism, combating intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, including against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions"]

Introduction

On 3 July 2018, supported by the LGBT National Survey Report², the UK Government stated its intention, as one action point in its LGBT Action Plan³, to ban "Conversion Therapy". Its Summary Report states that no definition of "Conversion Therapy" was provided⁴, but the Research Report's working definition, (using inaccurate, misleading and defamatory language)⁵ claims that these are "techniques intended to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity". The term "Conversion Therapy" appears to be a term imposed on any person or group not supporting the right to exploration of such feelings, for the purposes of moving away from them, on the assumption that to do so implies such persons are mentally ill and are being offered "cures". Therefore the identification of the label "gay" with persons having unwanted same-sex attractions is now becoming mandatory.

In 1994 psychologist and LGBT activist Dr Douglas Haldeman⁶ first used the term "Conversion Therapy". This is not the terminology of the Christian or any other religious community nor of qualified therapists willing to work with clients whose self-determined goal is to explore their heterosexual potential. Rather, the term is used by secular professionals who have effectively coined the term as a catch-all name for the worst practices that advocates of a ban want governments and the public to believe about how sessions with those seeking help function. The UK Government's documentation shows no nuanced understanding of the issue, and they have demonstrated no will to talk to us.

Core Issues Trust, supports the development of an independent body, "The International Federation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice". This new organisation will work to represent those who will be affected by such a ban. In supporting calls for this a ban, the UK Government is hampering the rights and freedoms of individuals who seek alternatives to gay-affirming therapies who wish to explore the fluidity of their sexual attractions, their heterosexual potential or to overcome their gender confusion. They do this for religious, for health or for the purpose of maintaining marriages to opposite sex partners.

Analysis

In the nine points that follow, we argue that everyone has the right to walk away from sexual practices and experiences that don't work for them and should be supported to do so. Footnotes provide information.

¹ **Core Issues Trust** (Charity number NI 105095) has supported the incorporation of the International Federation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC) which will defend the rights of its associates in the matter of the proposed ban on "Conversion Therapy" in the UK. The FTCC is Registered in England (10910877 - 11th August, 2017).

² **National Survey Report**: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report>

³ **LGBT Action Plan 2018**: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lgbt-action-plan-2018-improving-the-lives-of-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-people>

⁴ **Summary Research Report 2018:14**: "We did not provide a definition of conversion therapy in the survey, but it can range from pseudo-psychological treatments to, in extreme cases, surgical interventions and 'corrective' rape".

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-report/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report>]

⁵ **Research Report (2018:83)**: "So-called conversion therapies, sometimes also referred to as cure, aversion or reparative therapies, are techniques intended to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. These techniques can take many forms and commonly range from pseudo-psychological treatments to spiritual counselling. In extreme cases, they may also include surgical and hormonal interventions, or so-called 'corrective' rape."

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721704/LGBT-survey-research-report.pdf]

⁶ **Haldeman, Douglas C.** The practice and ethics of sexual orientation conversion therapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol 62(2), Apr 1994, 221-227

1. **When referring to “Conversion Therapy”, the National LGBT Survey Research Report makes no reference to the published literature** in the field nor to ideological diversity in research and debate, and as such represents “Advocacy Science”.
2. **Governed by one ideological viewpoint**, the UK's Professional Mental Health bodies have for some time enforced a de facto ban on “Conversion Therapy”. Dissension on the matter is not tolerated within professional memberships. This entrenches a mono-culture and “view-point discrimination” is the result; enquiry research has ceased on the topic, neither can it attract funding, or published recognition.
3. **The National LGBT Survey (2018) is flawed.** It is a volunteer online sample. Non-LGBT - and implicitly ex-LGBT – were ineligible. It is not clear how non-UK and multiple respondents were eliminated. It did not define ‘conversion therapy’ but asked only if people had experienced it or been offered it, and by who. It did not ask if the ‘conversion therapy’ was beneficial or harmful, nor the methods experienced. Policy and law based on this survey are therefore based on assumptions.
4. In UK society, ideological fault-lines separate those who conflate gender and sexual fluidity, from those who view sexuality as fluid and gender mostly as fixed. **Sexual Attraction Fluidity Exploration in Therapy (SAFE-T) is a valid and ethical response** to the extreme practices highlighted by the government's grab-all definitions.
5. **Evidence is being ignored** that sexuality is not innate, and is not immutable. This evidence includes population studies. The public is being denied right of access to counselling, based only on fears of “potential harm” and ideological preference.
6. Neither the Research Report of the National LGBT Survey, nor the LGBT Action Plan pay any attention to **questions of personal autonomy nor to the implications of the proposed ban implied in the European Convention on Human Rights.**
7. The state church, the Church of England, has urged the government to impose this ban. Using anecdotal evidence of only one type, and claiming spiritual abuse, they have done so without presenting *evidence* of harm or malpractice. **The church has actively refused audiences to listen to the testimonials of once-gay and ex-gay persons.** Neither have they shown discernment of legitimate counselling practice.
8. The Prime Minister, the **Rt. Hon. Teresa May**⁷ and the Minister for Women and Equalities the **Rt. Hon. Penny Mordaunt**⁸ have referred to the “abhorrent practice of “Conversion Therapy”. They have nevertheless **actively declined to meet individuals who claim to have benefited from counselling support for unwanted same-sex attractions and gender confusions**, thereby denying their identities.
9. **The UK government's documentation does not appear to be aware that the unintended consequences of banning** counselling for unwanted same-sex attractions and gender confusion, will be increased suicidal ideation for this population group.

⁷ ITV News, 3 July, 2018: <https://youtu.be/CNeaEosWxOk>

⁸ 4 July, 2018 Launch Event LGBT Action Plan: “The plan's commitments range from a national lead on healthcare, to banning the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy, to action on hate crime and combating bullying in our schools”
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/launch-event-lgbt-action-plan-2018>

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered:

1. **Corrective measures should be undertaken to listen to those who have benefitted from therapeutic and counselling support** for unwanted same-sex attractions and gender confusions. The National LGBT Survey deselected non-LGBT people. Yet SSA people helped by counselling and therapy are unlikely to retain an LGBT identity.
2. **Support, via the UK's Professional Standards Authority, for practitioners operating according to agreed practice guidelines** should be given to those offering counselling and therapeutic support for unwanted same-sex attractions and gender confusions. The IFTCC is an emerging organising provider of such professional standards.
3. **Recognition and development of UK case law highlighting "other" sexual minorities** such as "ex-gay" or those once gay or previously transgendered so that they are actually and not theoretically protected under the Equality Act of 2010 so that discrimination is unlawful.
4. **Acknowledgement that under-radar and clandestine operations are the product of bans.** Training, collegiality and accountability in cross-disciplinary learning environments are the best investment if harm is genuinely the government's concern.
5. **Resources should be deployed to support this minority group** to access suitably trained practitioners who historically are denied access (because of the de facto ban) to professional certification, supervision, collegiality, continuing professional development and professional indemnity insurance.

Submitted 13 September, 2018

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