

## **The Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA)**

I am a retired Methodist minister and have some experience of guiding people of all ages through difficult situations. For 10 years of my ministry I was chaplain in a Methodist boarding school for girls aged 11 to 18 years and, particularly with the help of my wife as unofficial partner in that chaplaincy, we have helped girls who have experienced growing through adolescence, for whom in some cases it was a quite traumatic experience!

I am concerned that some of the proposed changes fail to recognise the confusion that teenagers may experience, which in later years they can laugh at as they acknowledge it was a part of growing up.

I offer the following observations to some of the matters being considered.

### **Should the requirement for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria be removed?**

**No**

There is a safeguard in the present system which recognises that mental issues about self sex identification are complex, and that many people with such problems need help in unravelling their own feelings about their sex.

There has been an unprecedented rise in the number of young people identifying transgender problems in themselves, probably because so much more attention has been given to the topic than ever before, not least through social media, and young people in particular need sympathetic advice to help recognise what is relevant to their own situation, especially in adolescent years when emotions are new and strong and sometimes difficult to deal with. Even where there is a real foundation for a person to suspect they are 'in the wrong body' medical scrutiny gives the opportunity for alternative or additional diagnoses of mental problems to be reached. Without serious medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria a legal sex-change could take place unadvisedly or too soon.

Another matter is that without such requirement there is a danger that sex-change declarations by people with malicious intent would become easier.

### **Should there be changes to the requirement for individuals to have lived in their acquired gender for at least two years?**

**No**

The present requirement for evidence of two years living in the opposite sex is a safeguard. The desire to live as the opposite sex is often temporary, and some who took the decision to transition too soon regret the change, and once again feel trapped in the wrong body – but now of their acquired sex – and resent the fact that they were affirmed too quickly.

### **Does the spousal consent provision in the Act need reforming?**

**No**

The thinking behind spousal consent as at present is good.

Removing spousal consent would allow the prospective transgender person unilaterally to make decisions over their married partner contrary to the promises made at the time of the marriage, and contrary to the legal contract entered into. It would become a same-sex marriage, a different relationship and different legal contract, and the non-transitioning partner must have a say about this.

### **Should the age limit at which people can apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) be lowered?**

#### **No**

Teenagers are vulnerable to confusion about sexual relationships generally since the hormonal changes and new emotional experiences are very strong, and self sexual identification can be part of this. The lower age limit of 18 years should not be lowered.

It would be ironical if people who (in England and Wales) cannot legally get a tattoo, purchase cigarettes, alcohol or fireworks should be allowed to make a much more far-reaching decision about a change of sex! Some people claim to be transgender without experiencing gender dysphoria. Some who changed their sex when teenagers now complain that they were affirmed as transgender when they were too young.

**November 2020**