

Written evidence submitted by Miss Naomi Reid [GRA1819]

My name is Naomi Reid and I'm a trans woman... a normal woman, simply trying to live her life and enjoy the same freedoms as everyone else.

I was naturally one of those eagerly awaiting the outcome of the GRA reform, particularly after it was widely reported that 70% of those who answered the initial consultation responded positively regarding making the process of changing one's gender easier and giving greater protections to the trans people. It was a fantastic opportunity for the Government to make some real positive change reflecting how most of the public feel. Unfortunately, it was an opportunity missed.

I felt sick as I read the plans outlined by our government (which were the first of numerous documents somewhat interestingly leaked to The Times/New International). In the proceeding days there was increased press pick up as well as Liz Truss 'officially' unveiling her key principles for the reform. The first thing that struck me and essentially set the tone for where the supposed 'Equalities' minister saw trans people's place in society was the use of linguistics which were sensationalised and inflammatory and the impact of using words like 'Protection' is so plainly obvious, it clearly contributes to and perpetuates the stigma on trans people in society which indirectly leads to the frighteningly increasing levels of crime against trans people and the equally terrifying levels of suicide amongst the trans community.

The GRA reform and Liz Truss's proposals:

1. The protection of single-sex spaces.

The use of the words 'protect', 'protected' or 'protection' carry the implicit that trans people are something the public need to be shielded from, something to fear or to fight depending on an individual's disposition. It's clear that Liz Truss and the team who came up with this, either have had no interaction with real/everyday trans people or are being guided by voices that actively oppose trans people's existence. The way these principles were leaked, with no clarity on what they even meant, left the trans community scared and frustrated. My immediate thoughts were; will I be able to go out with friends? Go to restaurants? or business meetings? Will there be some kind of toilet ID system? I don't have a GRC – will I be able to use the bathroom? Without the basic human right of access to a bathroom I would not be able to participate in everyday life.

There seems to be an obsession with trans people, particularly trans women, and bathrooms. I can assure you every trans person I have met just wants to use a bathroom for it's designed purpose. Trans woman are not the issue as they are women – the issue is predatory men, who I and anyone I share the bathroom with are equally scared of. The whole argument of conflating these two issues literally denigrates the existence of trans women as it categorises us as men, predatory men at that! It also implies that people 'decide to be trans' for the purpose of accessing single sex spaces – this is the most insidious of sentiments... It denigrates the mental anguish I and most trans people went through trying to suppress who they are. The shame. The depression at not being 'normal'. Finally accepting yourself and then starting to socially transition: losing friends, partners, and for some, even family. Then having to endure the farcical process of being referred to a Gender Identity Clinic and the endless wait for treatment. **THIS IS NOT A FLIPPANT DECISION TO GAIN ACCESS TO A SINGLE SEX SPACE! IN MOST CASES IT'S A CHOICE BETWEEN SUICIDE AND LIVING!**

The only thing this principle element of reform did, is add greater stigma to trans people's existence.

2. Making sure transgender adults are free to live their lives as they wish without fear of persecution, whilst maintaining the proper checks and balances in the system.

As mentioned in response to the first principle on single sex spaces: a trans person having the courage to finally accept themselves and make the decision to live life in a way that allows them some semblance of happiness, is something that lives with them from the age they realise they are not like their peers. For me this was about 8 years old. I lived with this secret. This feeling of being different. The self-loathing. So, when I finally decided to make the decision to come out it is ridiculous to then have to wait, on average 4 years for the FIRST appointment at a GIC! At which point, you will not be prescribed hormones and often must wait another year before this can happen. Most GP's will not touch bridging hormones as there is not enough education for medical professionals and they are scared, perhaps of being sued or getting something wrong, I don't know... However, the point is; there is a reluctance and often gatekeeping of these pathways.

The main issue for me with this principle from Liz Truss and where the GRA reform utterly failed is that it maintains being trans is an illness, a psychological disorder. This is a disgusting sentiment. It positions trans people as mentally unstable and once again, the narrative for the general population is that trans people are these crazies who are trying to invade society!

The clinics that were in the pipeline for a long time now and not a new design, are a welcome addition to address the excess demand on places like the Tavistock & Portman GIC but don't nearly go far enough.

RE: The Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) – The principle of having to obtain this document in the first place is humiliating. Why should I need a certificate to define my gender? The process of having to prove, in my case, how female I am, to someone who doesn't know me or my lived experience. As in most instances with the people in government or these roles; they are likely to be a middle-aged cis white man or if it's a bit more diverse a cis white woman, both are highly unlikely to have any understanding of what it means to be trans and yet they are the gatekeeper for this. The whole concept of a GRC should be scrapped any people should be able to change what they want or need to change in terms of documentation.

3. Making sure under 18s are protected from decisions that they could make, that are irreversible in the future

Once again, we see the use of words like ‘protect’, ‘protected’ or ‘protection’ insinuating fear, stopping wrongdoing, or that it is happening to them rather than for them. The impact of using words like this is so plainly obvious and contributes to and perpetuates the othering of trans people in society.

This principle misleads the general public and gives the impression that children are being frivolously given ‘sex changes’ as certain newspapers like to portray.

Treatment for trans youth predominantly consists of therapy and hormone blockers. There should be absolutely no qualms with trans youth accessing therapy so I’m going to skip over that. RE: blockers, these pause the impact of natural puberty, allowing the person to get to an age where they are deemed to have enough autonomy to decide these things for themselves (again this is a decision made by gatekeepers with no idea what it’s like to be trans). At which stage, if they decide they don’t want to transition they can stop taking them. However, if they do decide to transition, this puts them in a place where they won’t have to go through a mentally debilitating puberty where their body doesn’t match who they are and is actively going further from that – this strain is a huge cause of mental health issues within the trans community. Without blockers, the trans person would then have to undergo costly and invasive surgery to try to reverse what didn’t need to happen in the first place. I would have given anything to have had the courage to say that I was trans before puberty hit and have access to blockers before the bodily traits associated with a gender that wasn’t my own set in.

I know this is not part of the GRA reform per se, but a Liz Truss grouped it in, so I am too. Trans youth should have the same access to treatment as anyone else. Anything else would be an infringement on their human rights.

Overall, the GRA reform did very little, if anything to genuinely help the trans community. The fact that our nations’ ‘Equalities’ departments came up with these reforms is shocking. They do not promote equality and if anything, widen the gap, add stigma to trans people, and give a platform for greater discrimination.

The biggest error of the reform was to not follow advice from the World Health Organisation saying being trans is not a psychological disorder.

The reforms need to be reviewed immediately, with new changes being brought in to reflect the results of the original consultation and Theresa May’s promise the Government would “streamline and de-medicalise” the process of changing your gender and reflect that “being trans is not an illness”.

I would be happy to discuss this further and would be happy to speak in person (in a COVID safe set-up). [...]

[...] Redacted by the Committee

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