

My name is Natalie Washington, a transgender woman based in Hampshire. I'm a trustee & organiser for Trans Pride Brighton & Hove, Europe's biggest trans pride event, and Campaign Lead for the Football v Transphobia campaign; a campaign to make the sport of football a better place for transgender people. I also consult & advise sporting organisations on trans issues, which I intend to refer to later.

I'd first like to address the government's response to the GRA consultation. From my conversations with the trans & wider LGBTQI+ community, it's clear that there is a great deal of disappointment with the proposed changes to the process. Personally, I feel that the proposals represent a missed opportunity to bring the UK in line with our aims of being among the world leaders in human rights. Moving the process entirely online is acceptable provided there are allowances for those who may struggle with that, but it represents a bare minimum in today's digital world. The real problems with the process as-is lie elsewhere. The reduction in fee is welcome, but again strikes me as a bare minimum change. Given the numbers of people using the process, I cannot see that the process is a significant driver of government cost either way. For applicants, most of the cost tends to lie elsewhere in any case – obtaining legal documents, getting very specific medical opinions – often these need to be obtained privately as individuals have often finished the NHS process without being issued an appropriately worded document, as the panel seems to be very specific in its requirements on this. My wife has obtained a GRC and spent upwards of £300 on legal fees and doctors' fees in total.

I don't intend to cover the requirements for obtaining a GRC in great detail here, as other submissions will speak to that issue with great efficacy, other than to add my voice to those asking for a removal of the requirement for gender dysphoria (which would reduce the burden on the NHS as well as serving trans people better), and that the two year criterion not only puts trans people in potential danger during that time, but raises ethical and cultural challenges with regard to what qualifies as 'living in an acquired gender'. It's difficult, I'd argue impossible, to legislate for that without resorting to damaging stereotypes which we, as a society, should not be reinforcing.

I'd like to share my experiences around the interaction between the GRA and the laws surrounding marriage, as I believe this effectively highlights some of the more nonsensical results of the law as it stands. My wife & I are both transgender women, both transitioned socially within a month of each other, and both underwent genital reconstruction surgery within 4 months of each other in 2017, with my being slightly earlier in both. My wife obtained a GRC in 2018, but I have not applied for one (primarily because the process is overwhelmingly difficult & I'm not confident I have the correctly worded documents, despite having done everything that reasonable people claim is necessary for obtaining gender recognition). We got married last year, but at the ceremony the registrar had no choice but to refer to me as 'husband', because I had no updated birth certificate. It was deeply upsetting for her to have to refer to me in this way, and was also upsetting for some of the guests on what should have been a day of happiness. Applying the reasonable person test to this situation, it surely seems incongruous that one of us could be referred to as we wished, and one couldn't. It also means that for me to obtain an updated birth certificate now, I'd have to obtain spousal consent from my wife who only obtained her own updated birth certificate 2 years previously! I cannot see how the spousal consent offers anything useful, and just ends up being a terrible weapon to be wielded between upset partners during a relationship breakdown; particularly given the absence of a 'no-fault' divorce option where a relationship has broken down.

The interaction with marriage law also brings me on to the age at which you can apply for a GRC. Given that it's possible to get married at 16, the above seems particularly unfair to those who may need a GRC before doing so. Given that gender recognition is a purely paper exercise, I cannot see

why it's not reasonable to offer this to younger people too – it can mean the difference between travelling safely or not, and being seen in the eyes of the law as who you really are is of a great importance to trans people regardless of age. The Scottish proposals include gender recognition at age 16, and I think we should be considering this as a minimum; I see no reason why it could not be younger. Incidentally, Scottish marriage law avoids the wording issue I mentioned before, given that it allows for more personalisation of the wording of a ceremony.

Moving onto the wider issues regarding transgender equality, I'd like to tackle some of the terms of reference items in order, starting with the number of people applying for GRCs. As I touched on earlier, the primary reason I have not applied despite having been eligible for around 5 years is that I'm not certain I have documents with the very specific wording required, and, having long been discharged by my GIC, I don't want to either have to wait several years to see an NHS clinician again purely to obtain a letter, and I'd rather not pay upwards of £250 to see a private clinician for the same. The process seems overwhelming to me. If I may put this into some context, I'm a degree educated person in their thirties who works for a major multinational managing a global IT function with teams across 4 continents & am responsible for several million dollars a year – I only say this to suggest that I probably should feel able to engage with this process, but do not.

The main challenge I see with the interaction with the GRA 2004 and the EA 2010 is confusion, leading to obfuscation. The lack of clarity about what serves as a reasonable exemption leads to what is sometimes clearly contrarian advice being given by anti-trans campaign groups in the hope that organisations will exclude trans people from their facilities. By way of example, I offer Fair Play for Women's [advice to service providers about female-only changing rooms](#), which specifically suggests that providers demand to see birth certificates before allowing women to use changing rooms. This would not only be an unnecessarily horrifying overreach, but ignores that birth certificates are very specifically and deliberately not considered a form of identification document, to the extent that it even says that on them! This is an organisation that, to my admitted horror, seems to be taken seriously by much of the UK's print and broadcast media. Similarly, earlier this year Baroness Nicholson wrote to some UK retailers offering similar advice, again with the aim of having transgender people excluded from changing rooms. This all allows for dangerous scaremongering to the wider public about predators in changing rooms, and adds to the ongoing level of anxiety trans people face just going about their daily lives.

This brings me back to my experiences in working with sporting organisations on transgender inclusion. Firstly, I'm pleased to say that the general attitude I see from such organisations is very positive towards trans people, which befits the general feeling I get from wider society (in stark contrast to that of the media). There is often significant confusion around the provisions in the EA and GRA for 'single sex' spaces, but usually the sentiment is to include rather than exclude. As I detailed above, more clarity would be of assistance here. The exemptions for sport (among others) do lead to a general feeling among the trans community that it's not an arena our presence is wanted in, and thus trans people often miss out on the great physical and mental health benefits (ending up a significantly underrepresented group in sport & physical activity participation). On trying to get involved, trans people (trans women more so) are often greeted with confusion and reticence, often hearing things like "I'll just have to check if you're allowed" or insistence on telling the entire club & any visiting opponents about that person's identity. The lack of provision for non-binary people is a particular issue here. Given that there is no legal recognition of non-binary identity and no specific protection under the EA 2010 for non-binary people, they're often completely erased and ignored. In sport for example, there is rarely a category for them to compete or even sign-up under.

Finally, I'd like to tackle the issue of how the handling of the proposed changes to date have informed the coverage of this activity, and trans people in general, in media. The British trans community has felt under siege for years now, and is extremely hurt and worn down, which I fear will be reflected in their participation in this call for evidence. Unfortunately, it seems that we have become a political football, a wedge issue, a dead cat to be thrown to the media when a distraction is required. A significant and voluble anti-trans campaign ecosystem has grown up around the review, and is not going to disappear overnight whatever happens with this activity. We need urgent and significant action from the government to protect our trans community from harm, in what has become a horribly toxic environment in which to exist. I know several trans people who have moved to other countries to escape, and I've even considered it myself. There is scarcely a media outlet who can be trusted to cover our community sensitively or, dare I say it, even honestly. I'd urge the committee to consider this in their response, and to remember that both trans people and those who seek to hurt us will be following this closely.