

Written evidence submitted by Mr Sam Jones [GRA1969]

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

Gender Reassignment (GR) is a big decision, and those contemplating it deserve the very best support possible. Medical practitioners are highly trained, extremely caring and offer invaluable assistance to patients considering GR. Many people experiencing gender dysphoria also experience mental health problems, and so it's important for them to have a thorough assessment so that any appropriate support or treatment can be provided, especially to address any condition which might affect their sense of gender identity. This assessment should not be seen as a hindrance or a hurdle, but as a positive, compassionate component of the process, which offers a valuable opportunity to identify how some often very vulnerable people can be supported to live full, well lives. If anything it would be good to strengthen what is offered to include multiple sessions with practitioners from any relevant specialities.

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

No, it's definitely not something to rush. People must of course be listened to, supported and respected from the earliest opportunity, but time and experience are very important in determining the best impression of a person's settled view. It would not be kind to allow people to undergo GR who have not tried out life as the opposite gender for a good length of time – that would surely only increase the already significant minority who regret their decision.

- What is your view of the statutory declaration and should any changes have been made to it?

GR is a significant legal matter so it's really important that anyone going through it to have a full understanding of the consequences.

- Does the spousal consent provision in the Act need reforming? If so, how? If it needs reforming or removal, is anything else needed to protect any rights of the spouse or civil partner?

If a married person undergoes GR, that fundamentally changes their marriage. It's therefore essential that their spouse gives their consent to this, if the two are to remain married.

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

A quote from the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/>

“Children may show an interest in clothes or toys that society tells us are more often associated with the opposite gender. They may be unhappy with their physical sex characteristics.

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However, this type of behaviour is reasonably common in childhood and is part of growing up. It does not mean that all children behaving this way have gender dysphoria or other gender identity issues.

A small number of children may feel lasting and severe distress, which gets worse as they get older. This often happens around puberty, when young people might feel that their physical appearance does not match their gender identity.

This feeling can continue into adulthood with some people having a strong desire to change parts of their physical appearance, such as facial hair or breasts.”

Many children and indeed young adults are very insecure, so it would be potentially be very harmful for even younger children to be allowed to apply for a GRC, a decision they may later regret. I don't doubt for a minute that young people often know their own minds with great certainty, but how could they know how they will feel in a couple of years, never mind in 5 or 10 years time? Let's invest in mental health and counselling services to support children, right through from the crucial early years into adulthood. Help them explore their understanding of who they are, how they fit in the world, develop self esteem and acceptance of their uniqueness. This would be far more valuable (albeit more expensive in the short term) than handing out GRC's.

- What else should the Government have included in its proposals, if anything?

A statement acknowledging that GR is a controversial matter since biological sex is genetic.

Wider issues concerning transgender equality and current legislation:

- Are legal reforms needed to better support the rights of gender-fluid and non-binary people? If so, how?

Every person is unique, yet we are all biologically either male or female. When the law recognises a person's sex therefore, it is simply acknowledging biological fact. A person may not like the societal associations that go with either the male or female biology, but that just means we should seek to change society, since the a third sex cannot be imposed upon the human genetic code by any means, least of all by legislation!

I'd like to live in a world where people don't feel pressured to conform to societal gender stereotypes. Where a person's strengths and gifts are celebrated, regardless of whether they are typical of that person's biological sex. Surely then it would be easier (though still not always easy) for everyone to embrace the unique individual that they are, in every respect, including their sex. Self improvement can be a wonderful aim, but psychologists agree it's better to accept those things we can't change. That isn't easy, we all need a little help sometimes, and on occasions some big help. So let's make that help available: compassionate and practical support and counselling, and go for maximum flourishing all round.

Could a third sex be defined in a way that would be widely recognised and fully accepted by those who self describe as gender-fluid or non-binary? Surely there would then still be many others who would still feel left out, in which case how many different sexes might the law feasibly recognise? Does it make sense to put one or more 'new' sexes in the same category as the two biological sexes?

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