

## Gender Recognition Act 2004

I have belated become aware of this call for evidence. In view of the shortness of time, I therefore confine myself to the single question: should the age limit at which people can apply for a GRC be lowered?

As an educationalist, my short answer to this question is No. The present age limit of 18 is, for most purposes, the legal age of maturity. However, for certain purposes – such as driving a car – the limit is 17. There are a number of pressures in society to lower such limits for various reasons, including for example the voting age.

But while these limits might be altered by legislative fiat, they all of them fall within the generally recognised range of adolescence. This does not end by reaching the age of majority. As a rule of thumb, adolescence for females ranges from puberty until around 21, while for males it is from puberty to 25. While the upper limits are matters for debate, it is generally accepted that self-identity is rarely achieved before 18 (Adelson, *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* 1980).

Indeed, it is argued in some quarters that the increased emphasis on university education for 50% of school-leavers has the cultural effect of prolonging adolescence, by postponing the adoption of adult responsibilities.

A lowering of the age for alternative gender recognition would therefore be liable to increase gender confusion at an age when young people are vulnerable. Such vulnerability extends not only to their immediate personal and social circumstances. The young are also vulnerable to what may be cultural trends. It is a widespread phenomenon that adults look back to their teenage years in wonder at what they then believed and did.

Gender change, however, is not a passing fad. Puberty blockers and transgender surgery are irreversible. The harm caused to those who later wish to detransition cannot be undone. You will be aware of the concerns that have been raised about the Tavistock Gender Identity Development Service in this regard.

To lower the age limit for gender transition would, I believe, be harmful in the extreme to those affected by it. Most gender confusion is outgrown by adulthood. Legally to risk reinforcing such confusion would render a profound disservice to the young.

Moreover, it would as a byproduct add unnecessarily to the labours of our secondary schools. Too many pupils already grow up in the context of dysfunctional households and schools struggle to help them with their consequent difficulties. To add a layer of complexity does not increase safeguarding. Rather it tends to jeopardise it.

In conclusion, I may add that the consequences of a change of age limit would not be confined to teenagers. There is effectively a transgender lobby which seeks to extend its influence not just to junior children but to infants also. Morag Hood's book *Brenda is a sheep* is a case in point. Parliament should legislate to protect our children, not put them at greater risk.

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*G. L. E. Locke*