

## Written evidence submitted by Ms Sarra Real [GEO0034]

**Introduction and reasons for submitting evidence:** I am submitting this as an individual affected by any changes in legislation. As a **woman**, and the **mother** of a daughter, I feel it's vital that the interests of women (51% of the population) continue to be represented and our opinions listened to and taken into account.

### Structure and function of GEO; data

As a woman, in my view, it's vital that this work continues to be within the remit of the Cabinet Office, rather than consigned to secondary workstreams and given lesser priority. It is also vital that the data collected by the ONS remains uncorrupted, or how is the GEO supposed to track matters such as equal pay?

### Dual Departmental Role

Despite having a busy year with multiple trade deals in the run up to Brexit, Liz Truss has done a fantastic job in keeping this on track and should be commended for her achievements with the brief.

In particular, her **dedication to the consultation around the Gender Recognition Act** and balancing the needs and rights of women in this debate deserves commendation. It has too long been considered a matter pertaining only to the protected characteristic of gender identity, when in reality there is a **considerable impact on women's rights also which has been largely ignored** by previous Ministers. This was a tricky and contentious issue which she has handled with aplomb and diplomacy, with good balancing of conflicting interests.

In my view the decision not to reform it was the right one, given the disproportionate impact on women and girls (especially those from **religious minorities**) of a move to Self ID. The **expansion of the trans umbrella** definition by Stonewall now goes **way beyond the few thousand covered by the GRA**. Indeed, it is now estimated there could be as many as [half a million](#) transgender people. In my view, this change would therefore have seen significant and **disproportionate impact** for women. This expansion of numbers must be taken into account in the Select Committee's Gender Recognition Act inquiry.

In particular it was a good decision to put a break on public bodies eg the EHRC and organisations eg the Girlguides **'getting ahead of the law'**, as regards Self ID, forcing women as individuals to **fundraise to uphold our legal rights**. In particular, it will be interesting to see the decision made with the Ann Sinnott legal challenge here. It cannot be right for the rule of law to be so lightly disregarded. In the Equality Act, a **woman is defined as a female of any age**. That this is a **biological female** (ie legally defined by sex, not gender expression) is made very clear in the exemptions set out. The Equality Act 2010 makes the exceptions and the [reasoning behind them for the safety, privacy and dignity of women](#) very clear.

That this has been ignored has time and again been shown to have a negative impact on women, such as the increasing number of assaults in Gender Neutral changing rooms. This resulting negative impact on women and their needs should be carefully considered by the Select Committee's Gender Recognition Act inquiry.

### Global obligations

It would also have taken us considerably out of step with the **lived experience of global women, who cannot identify out of the oppression** as regards FGM, child marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution and other horrors. If we are truly looking to support international

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obligations, biological facts and the **biological basis for female oppression** cannot be so lightly disregarded. It is my view that the current international joint departmental role is valuable here in informing our support of and compliance with international obligations.

### Role of Select Committee and possible bias

I am however very concerned however with the **role and focus of the Select Committee** and their ability to improve equality and reduce discrimination and disadvantage for all in the UK. I believe that they are **not treating all of the protected characteristics with equal balance**, as has been clear in the Gender Recognition Act inquiry meeting before Christmas. Whilst I think scrutiny of Ministers by Committees is good, I don't see how this can be done properly if one committee is overseeing all these different areas of discrimination, even if on occasions they do overlap.

In particular, my external perception as a woman is that **Caroline Noakes and her team are not listening sufficiently to women**. To my mind, it was notable that the representatives advocating for women (Professor Rosa Freedman of the University of Reading, Dr Kathleen Stock of the University of Sussex and professor Alice Sullivan of UCL) were **addressed less respectfully** (by first name, no professional titles) than those advocating for transgender people. This was most revealing and raises **question marks about balance**. This seemed to suggest women's views are at best being subconsciously disregarded, and at worst, given only lipservice by the Select Committee.

### Balancing conflicts of interest in the Select Committee Inquiry

**Women are 51% of the population, and our views should be listened to.** Despite recent advances in equality legislation, we remain disadvantaged by society, for example as regards equal pay. It is not right that our views are not respectfully considered in matters that have such significant impact on our safety, privacy and dignity.

It is crucial that any inquiry also takes into account the impact on religious minorities and lesbians. The ongoing **Allison Bailey versus Stonewall case** makes it very clear that there is a conflict between trans rights and those of lesbians: a black, working class lesbian suing Stonewall and alledging they do not represent her interests is surely something to sit up and take notice of! While the definition of the protected characteristic remains same-sex attraction, Stonewall has redefined this to be same-gender attraction - to the detriment of homosexuals.

Given the potential conflicts of interest between different vulnerable groups, there must be more focus to distribute funding and Committee attention more equally.

It should be noted here that the position that transwomen are not women is especially a position held by **left-leaning feminists, notably many lesbians**. What's more likely - that a load of life-long left-leaning LGBT-supporting women have inexplicably become bigots, or that one might be missing something here? I would suggest that the vast majority of these women are actually supportive of trans rights.

If this is the position of the 'reasonable' left-leaning women, then I would suggest that the **vast majority of more mainstream**, centric and right-wing parents and grandparents will have similar concerns if they are made aware of the issue. This is evidenced by [The Times poll](#) of its readers poll regarding the Gender Recognition Act.

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**The principle of "reasonable man"** really should be applied in this inquiry. Most people, if asked, think a transwoman has had surgery to remove their penises (as evidenced by the change in opinion on whether transwomen should be allowed eg in women's toilets in the [YouGov poll](#) on this issue). When they are aware that the [overwhelming majority of transwomen retain their penis](#), majority opinion changes considerably. Most people are not aware that the term transgender does not now simply mean transexual, but also includes transvestites. It is my view that this majority awareness and opinion really should be considered.

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