

March 2024

Government departments and arms-length bodies

- **Office for Statistics Regulation**

On 11th March, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published an [exchange of letters](#) with the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) regarding [new guidance](#) in applying the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics for the collection and reporting of statistics and data about sex and gender identity.

The guidance states: “Official statistics producers should have a strong understanding of their own data collections and how these meet the needs of their users, that producers should be clear about what information they are collecting and why, and explain this information as straightforwardly as possible both to respondents and data users.”

- **NHS England**

On 12th March NHS England [announced](#) that puberty-suppressing hormones will no longer be routinely prescribed for children and young people who have gender incongruence/gender dysphoria. Both the Welsh Government and the Northern Irish Government have also confirmed in answers to written questions that the same policy will apply in these nations. See [WQ91974\(e\) \(Wales\)](#) and [Newsletter \(press report\) \(Northern Ireland\)](#). The Scottish Government set out its current position in the **Scottish Parliament** on 28th March: “The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland remain observers of that study development, and we are considering what further engagement may be appropriate.” See [General Question Time Official Report](#).

On 21st March NHS England published a new [“clinical commissioning policy for prescribing “gender affirming hormones \(masculinising or feminising hormones\)”](#) as part of the children and young people’s gender service. The document confirms that these hormones are available “as a routine commissioning treatment option for young people with continuing gender incongruence / gender dysphoria from around their 16th birthday subject to individuals meeting [certain] eligibility and readiness criteria”.

House of Commons

- On 4th March, **Peter Gibson (Conservative)(Darlington)** [tabled a written question](#) asking when draft legislation to ban conversion practices will be published. Stuart Andrew, [answering for the Government](#) on 13th March, stated that a draft bill “is being finalised” that will need to be put forward for pre-legislative scrutiny and will take account of the Cass Review.
- On 6th March, **Nick Fletcher (Conservative)(Don Valley)** [tabled a written question](#) asking the Cabinet Office about the numbers and cost of staff involvement in the a:gender staff network. John Glen, [answering for the Government](#) on 15th March, stated: “The costs (covering the period 2022-23) were £82,000. A decision has been made since then that no further funding will be provided”.

- On 14th March **Sir John Hayes (Conservative)(South Holland and The Deepings)** [tabled a written question](#) asking how many children in England have been issued puberty blockers since 2019. Maria Caulfield, [answering for the Government](#) on 25th March, stated that these drugs are used to treat medical conditions including cancer and precocious puberty as well as gender dysphoria and that information on the clinical indication for which the medications were prescribed is not held centrally. However, a data table is provided with numbers of all identifiable patients that received the treatment since 2018/19, which shows numbers declining each year to 2022.
- During a debate on the new extremism definition on 14th March, **Joanna Cherry (SNP)(Edinburgh South West)** [raised](#) the importance of compliance with the human right to freedom of expression, religion and belief and the MPs' duty "not to brand groups "extreme" or "hateful" simply because they disagree with them", noting that the LGB Alliance had previously been described by MPs as a "hate group" for raising "hitherto unfashionable but now vindicated concerns about the prescription of puberty blockers" . **The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Michael Gove**, [agreed](#) that the rights to free speech and free association must be respected, and commended the Government on the puberty-blocker ban, and Joanna Cherry for her championing of this position in the face of opposition.
- On 15th March, **Alicia Kearns (Conservative)(Rutland and Melton)** withdrew her previous tabled amendment to the Criminal Justice bill regarding banning conversion practices, replacing this with a new version: [NC30 \(p30\)](#).

Later in March she then withdrew this and tabled a new version: [NC27 \(p26\)](#). At the same time **Elliot Colborn (Conservative)(Carshalton and Wallington)** tabled another new amendment to the bill: [NC32 \(p22\)](#) which would add a clause on "Aggravated offences: hostility towards transgender identity, sexual orientation and disability".

The bill is expected to come to the Commons for debate shortly after the Easter recess.

- **Elizabeth Truss (Conservative)(South West Norfolk)**'s private member's bill: [the Health and Equality Acts \(Amendment\) Bill](#), was the third ballot bill on the order paper for second reading on 15th March. The bill would have introduced measures to regulate access to hormone therapy for children; legislated against schools socially transitioning children and clarified the meaning of the protected characteristic of sex in the Equality Act. Sex Matters provided a [one-page briefing on the bill](#) for MPs.

The bill was not debated, with debate on the two previous bills taking up the entire parliamentary time allocated for private members' bills. It was suggested by some members that this was not accidental. During the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) bill debate. **Sally-Ann Hart (Conservative)(Hastings and Rye)** [said](#) she knew Government Members wanted to give time for Truss's Bill, noting that "She also got a place on the ballot, but Labour Members are keen to talk out that Bill because they have no interest in safeguarding children against extreme trans ideology and are frit about any debate on that issue.". Later on, **Jane Stevenson (Conservative)(Wolverhampton North East)** [intervened](#) on the opposition spokesperson's contribution: "I am one of the most passionate people about animal welfare in this place, and it is lovely to see some new converts on the Labour Benches discussing animal welfare... And on the Labour Front Bench. However, I would

also be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's thoughts on Labour's determination to prevent single-sex spaces being discussed today, because that issue is also important to my constituents."

- On 18th March there was a [Westminster Hall debate on on LGBT content in relationships education in schools](#). The debate considered two opposing e-petitions regarding whether or not such content should be removed. Many members pointed to the ongoing review commissioned by the government into RHSE and there was a consensus that parents should have the right to review materials used. There was also significant discussion about the importance of age and developmentally appropriate material.
 - **Elliot Colburn (Conservative) (Carshalton and Wallington)** argued that "With regard to the accusations of extreme, inappropriate, highly sexual material or similar, there is simply not the data to back up many of those claims". Also speaking from this perspective was **Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Labour)(Brighton, Kemptown)**, **Ben Bradshaw (Labour)(Exeter)** and **Sarah Champion (Labour)(Rotherham)** who said "lessons from section 28... inform the cross-party support for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in guidance on relationships, health and sex education."
 - **Peter Gibson (Conservative) (Darlington)**, also speaking from this perspective, made some broader comments on related subjects:

"I believe it is possible to stand up for the protection of safe spaces for women so that they are safe and comfortable, at the same time as having respect for those with gender dysphoria. I also believe that women should be entitled to compete in sports with other women. For the record, I respect trans people and want them to be free from discrimination, but I respect women, too, and they are entitled to have their spaces in which they are safe and comfortable."

- Speakers from the opposing perspective included **Adam Holloway (Conservative) (Gravesham)** who spoke about an academy trust in his constituency developing a syllabus for primary school children that promoted transgender ideology; **Dame Andrea Jenkyns (Conservative)(Moreley and Outwood)**:

"I do not want [primary-aged] children, straight or gay, to learn about sex full stop. I also do not want young children in primary school to be taught about changing gender"

and **Nick Fletcher (Conservative)(Don Valley)** who focused on children being taught about transgenderism:

"Children should not be subject, under any circumstances, to unscientific ideological material that leads to harm. I believe there is nothing more abhorrent than misleading the young, and it must stop."

- On 19th March, **Darren Jones (Labour)(Bristol North West)** [asked a written question](#) asking whether DfE consulted transgender students, their families and organisations that represent transgender people's views on the draft guidance for schools and colleges on gender questioning children. [Answering for the government](#), education minister Damian Hinds confirmed that any member of the public had the opportunity to respond to the consultation.
- On 20th March, **Julian Sturdy (Conservative)(York Outer)** [tabled a written question](#) asking what DfE has done to "protect trans children from bullying and harassment in schools". Children's minister

David Johnston, [answering for the Government](#), gave an answer about government's policy and initiatives to tackle bullying generally and referred to the draft guidance for schools on gender questioning schools, published on 19th December "which was clear that bullying must never be tolerated". He said the final publication of the guidance will be "later this year."

- On 22nd March, **Royston Smith (Conservative)(Southampton, Itchen)** tabled a written question to the Department of Health and Social Care: "How many children of which biological sex were prescribed puberty blockers in each year since 2010?"

House of Lords

- On 26th February, **Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated)** tabled a [written question](#) asking for the Government's assessment of "advice from NHS Sussex trust that male lactation fluid is (1) safe and (2) beneficial for infants." Lord Markham's [answer for the Government](#) on 2nd April stated:

"The welfare of the baby is always the primary concern, and the evidence is clear that a mother's breastmilk has significant advantages... Induced lactation is an area where further scientific and fact-based evaluation is needed.

"We have been clear that biological sex matters and it is important that health services recognise and support the different health and biological needs of men and women."

- On 14th March, **Lord Strathcarron (Conservative)** tabled a [written question](#) asking about NHS England guidance stating that "Not everyone who experiences menopause is a woman." The [Government's answer](#) from Lord Markham stated that NHS England is currently reviewing its internal policy on menopause and on 13th March published a draft of this "in error" and that NHS England "will publish updated policy in the next few weeks." He was clear that the Government position is that "biological sex matters, and it is important to use language that recognises the separate health and biological needs of men and women."
- On 12th March, a [Grand Committee considered](#) the **Gender Recognition (Approved Countries and Territories and Saving Provision) Order 2023**, a statutory instrument that updates the list of countries and territories from which citizens are eligible for the fast-track gender recognition certificate process. The intention is to remove countries that do not require a medical diagnosis for legal gender recognition. **Baroness Thornton (Labour)**, **Lord Henley (Conservative)**, **Baroness Barker (Lib Dem)**, and the minister **Baroness Barran (Conservative)** participated in the short debate.
- On 28th March **Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Labour)** tabled a [written question](#) asking if the Government has reviewed the Care Quality Commission's decision to approve registration of Gender Plus Healthcare, which can refer patients aged 16–18 for cross-sex hormones. An answer is due by 11th April.

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