

Conversion practices draft bill

Briefing, 25th June 2026

The government has published a draft bill (CP 1604) “to create new offences in relation to the carrying out of abusive conversion practices on individuals” in England and Wales. This is our initial analysis.

A wide-ranging definition

The bill defines “conversion practice” as any conduct with the intention of causing the individual to have or not to have to believe that they have or do not have a particular sexual orientation or a particular transgender identity. The question of whether conduct amounts to an abuse is a question of fact “to be determined by reference to all the circumstances of the case”.

This open-ended and subjective definition will lead to parents, teachers, therapists, youth workers, pastoral leaders and others being investigated by the police and possibly submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service for assessment and prosecution.

The bill says that assessing the nature of the conduct should consider a list of factors including, but not limited to, whether the conduct involves:

- (a) words or behaviour of a sexual nature
- (b) violent or threatening words or behaviour
- (c) controlling or coercive words or behaviour
- (d) use of economic pressure
- (e) use of psychological or emotional pressure.

The explanatory notes say:

“A wide range of acts can constitute a conversion practice. For instance, they can range from physical acts such as beating a person in an attempt to change their sexual orientation or transgender identity, to abusive psychological abuse which degrades or manipulates the individual to coercive control over the individual’s everyday movements and finances.”

Of course beating a person is already a crime, and so is coercive control between husbands and wives, civil partners and those in intimate relationships or who have children together, as well as parents, step-parents, children and grandparents.

A vaguely defined offence

The offence of carrying out an abusive conversion practice on an individual is defined in terms of causing “serious harm” to the individual’s physical or mental health, or “serious alarm or distress to the individual which has a substantial adverse effect on their usual day-to-day activities”.

The explanatory notes say:

“Research indicates that conversion practices are associated with a wide range of self-reported mental, physical, and economic harms, including depression, suicidal ideation, and severe psychological distress.”

This mirrors the findings of the research commissioned by the previous government from Coventry University, which claimed to have found “increasing evidence that attempts to change a person’s [...] gender identity can cause serious harms”. We have previously written about the poor quality of this research which did not find any evidence demonstrating causality ([Sex Matters, 2021: Rapid review of Coventry University research on conversion therapy.](#))

Sexual orientation is defined conventionally as orientation towards individuals of the same sex, the opposite sex or both. “Transgender identity” is defined expansively as including the definition of gender reassignment and transexual in the Equality Act or if “the individual identifies as neither male nor female or as not solely male or female”, but it “is not limited” to these descriptions. It would be the first time that the concept of non-binary identification is recognised in UK law.

Making Equality Act compliance a criminal offence?

The crime may be tried as a summary offence at a magistrates’ court which can hand down a 12-month prison sentence, or by the Crown Court leading to imprisonment of up to five years. It also creates an offence by corporate bodies such as companies and partnerships, making directors responsible if the organisation “authorises or permits, participates in, or fails to take all reasonable steps to prevent the commission of the offence”.

Although it provides an exception for medical professionals if they can show they have not acted “in a way that falls far below the standards reasonably expected of a person in their position”, it will capture many others.

People and organisations that do not accept that being male or female is a matter of identity or who take steps that deter people from undertaking their “usual day-to-day activities” where this includes the expectation that they should be allowed to use opposite-sex facilities and services are likely to find themselves being reported to the police.

Anyone could bring a private prosecution under this bill, which is particularly concerning. It also raises concerns about whether people could get a fair trial for this offence, since the judge and jury would be required to express the belief that a transgender identity is what defines someone as male or female.

Crucially, ministers have opted for the slow track: this will be a draft bill to be sent for pre-legislative scrutiny by a joint committee. This gives parliamentarians, clinicians, parents, and teachers a vital window to influence what happens next.