

Catholic Head Teachers of the Diocese of Motherwell

Questions

1 Do you have any comments on the proposal that applicants must live in their acquired gender for at least 3 months before applying for a GRC?

Yes

If yes, please outline these comments.:

This is too short a period of time for such a permanent and life-changing decision, especially given that it is already a time characterised by great emotional and physical change. Many of our young people who are 16 are thinking about exams, jobs or further education. It is unfair to add something as weighty as gender to this already pressured time. Not every young person will be mature enough to appreciate the magnitude of such a decision at 16 years old and the implications of living the acquired gender won't necessarily be understood.

Most people will go through a long period of discernment before making a permanent decision such as this. As Head Teachers, we are already very aware of how stretched counselling and related services are and would have questions regarding the capacity of services to provide this accompaniment. What support is there for these young people? And who will provide this given that it is an area severely lacking in research to inform best practice?

Research states that full brain development is not achieved until around the age of 25, yet this proposal would allow such a decision to be taken well in advance of this. This has to be considered prior to any change in legislation. The recent guidelines issued from the Scottish Sentencing Council follows research saying imbalances in brain development explain risk-taking and emotionally driven behaviour and that this should make us consider the age at which young people are psychologically ready for prison. How can we suggest that on the one hand young people are mature enough at 16 to make permanent and life-altering decisions whilst simultaneously saying that they do not reach psychological maturity until age 25?

Although it remains questionable that every 18 year old would have the maturity to make a decision such as this, the age must, at the very least, remain at 18 and not be lowered.

2 Do you have any comments on the proposal that applicants must go through a period of reflection for at least 3 months before obtaining a GRC?

Yes

If yes, please outline these comments.:

A period of reflection for any major decision is essential. Three months is not a significant amount of time in which to look at all options, consider existing

mitigating factors in the lives of these young people or co-ordinate appropriate support strategies to ensure that all aspects and scenarios have been considered. This applies to both surgical and non-surgical interventions. Three months does not allow enough time to consider the impact on the physical, emotional, mental well being on the young person on question.

As educators, we have observed that very often young people who question their gender do so gradually over a period of time. It is very rare that a young person would come to such a definitive decision within such a short space of time and certainly not three months. There is not sufficient reasoning for this change of time frame.

3 Should the minimum age at which a person can apply for legal gender recognition be reduced from 18 to 16?

No

If you wish, please give reasons for your view.:

Absolutely not. As a society, we are extending the transition to adulthood all the time. We see the average age of people remaining in the parental home rising and the number of young people remaining in post-16 education being encouraged. Why then are we so keen to enable our young people to make permanent and life-altering decisions at a younger age than is necessary or reasonable?

We are not looking after our young people at a time when they are most vulnerable to outside influences. As Head Teachers, we experience first-hand the negative effect that social media can have on our young people. They experience constant pressure to fit into a mode of being that takes little consideration of them as individuals. What is presented on social media in terms of sexuality and gender can be dangerous and misleading and leaves no room for young people to make sense of their own identity but rather clouds decision making and judgements.

The examples of other decisions people aged 16 are able to make in Scotland are not comparable in gravity. The choices on that list are not necessarily life changing or permanent.

There is also insufficient research about long-term effects of hormonal and other medical interventions. We must acknowledge that as well as physical effects of such medications, there may also be detrimental mental health effects too. This is tantamount to experimentation on our young people and cannot be tolerated.

4 Do you have any other comments on the provisions of the draft Bill?

Yes

If yes, please outline these comments.:

We are concerned that medical professionals are feeling pressure to express certain opinions for fear of being accused of prejudice. Are there safeguards in place that allow them to express their professional opinions and have them respected?

As Leaders in Catholic Denominational schools, we are committed to ensuring the well being of every pupil in our care, especially the most vulnerable. We need to protect our young people, not facilitate situations which may cause them harm.

There is a politicisation of this issue. People are intimidated and lack confidence to respond clearly for fear of being accused of prejudice towards a protected group. The well-being of each child must remain the priority and professionals given the freedom to express how best to respond. We would much rather have improved support for the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our young people than an unjustified added pressure.

We are concerned that appropriate information and support for those people experiencing gender dysphoria or who are questioning their gender is being replaced by promotion of transition. Is changing gender seen as an answer to all difficulties and challenges any given young person may be experiencing because it is being promoted? We need to be realistic about the fact that, even after having your acquired gender legally recognised, it is likely that previous experiences of anxiety, depression etc. will remain. This is not a quick fix.

5 Do you have any comments on the draft Impact Assessments?

Yes

If yes, please outline these comments.:

The permanence of this decision needs to be emphasised in the proposal. A person could reasonably assume that because the process of having your acquired gender is being made easier, that there would be a similar process should you wish to reverse this decision.

Schools already assume many social responsibilities and are accountable for much more than education. If the age is reduced to 16, and these young people remain in school, it will necessarily have an impact upon the service that schools can provide. Within an already burdened system, we simply do not have the capacity to meet these needs.

We are also concerned about the broader implications this will have for the safety and protection of women and girls both in schools and in wider society. We feel strongly about the need for 'female only' areas such as changing rooms and other facilities. We have to protect all children and could potentially end up with a person self-identifying as female at whatever age sharing toilets/changing facilities etc. with much younger girls. We can manage this at the moment but I do think it could be open to abuse.

The implications for any school (but especially Catholic and other Faith schools) are concerning - bureaucracy; adaptations to buildings etc. whilst people transition etc. and breaches of GRR legislation. Consideration needs to be given also to parental choice to send their child to a Catholic school and the faith values this represents. Are Catholic schools then under 'attack' based on incorrect perceptions of our faith values?