

# Policy Proposal: Gender Recognition Act

Submitted by: Cambridge University Students' Union

## Summary

Liz Truss' comments about young transgender people's right to access healthcare have caused considerable concern amongst transgender people and their allies. As NUS' membership includes FE colleges that educate 16-18 year olds, we believe it's important that NUS takes a strong stance in campaigning on behalf of their rights and access to essential healthcare. This motion mandates working for the protection of the rights of trans students and campaigning for the provision and promotion of resources for their welfare.

## What are the issues?

On 22 April 2020, the Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss gave a speech to the Women and Equalities Select Committee outlining her priorities for the Government Equalities Office<sup>1</sup>. This speech contained worrying rhetoric including reference to "protection of single-sex spaces"; "maintaining the proper checks and balances" in the systems which allow legal recognition for trans adults; and "making sure that under 18s are protected from decisions that they could make"; all of which represent classic anti-trans talking points.

These comments come in the context of the scheduled Gender Recognition Act (GRA) reform<sup>2</sup>, which will be a pivotal moment for the advancement or regression of trans rights in the UK<sup>3</sup>. The NUS membership includes 16-18 year old trans people who could be particularly affected both by these comments and by any future decisions regarding their access to healthcare.

Young trans and non-binary people's access to trans-affirming healthcare and welfare support is absolutely vital to their wellbeing.

Coinciding with the GRA reform consultation, we have seen a worrying trend for groups seeking to create divisions within the LGBT+ community; and TERF groups seeking to co-opt GRA reform to regress trans rights; as well as widespread transphobia within the British press.

Government ministers should not be using rhetoric liable to inflame an already transphobic media and embolden anti-trans lobby groups.

During the covid-19 lockdown, when direct action is more difficult, it is doubly vital that we are vocal and active in our support of trans people and do not allow the government to use this as an opportunity to regress trans rights.

Most obviously, these issues affect students within the Trans campaign and, therefore, the LGBT+ campaign. It's important for this to be considered as a cross-conference issue because of the way that these comments contribute to the fiction that those campaigning for women's rights and those campaigning for trans rights are campaigning against each other for mutually exclusive aims. It is therefore vital that campaigning done on this issue involves the LGBT+, Women's, and Trans campaigns. The Trans

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-for-women-and-equalities-liz-truss-sets-out-priorities-to-women-and-equalities-select-committee>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-the-gender-recognition-act-2004>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/why-were-worried-about-government-s-statement-trans-rights-legislation>

campaign also intersects with all of the other liberation campaigns, and students who fall into multiple categories face often specific and intensified bigotry around their trans identity, as well as often already having greater material barriers to transition and access to trans-specific healthcare. For example, the rhetoric of "single-sex spaces" is used to exclude transfeminine people from women's spaces where they should be represented, which falls under the purview of the Women's campaign as well.

### **What could be the solutions?**

Fundamentally, national legislation requires national solutions, and campaigning must take place to ensure that MPs work for and not against the rights of their constituents. On a smaller scale, trans students (who are threatened and can be marginalised by such institutionalised bigotry) must be provided with resources, support, and spaces to allow them to stay safe and healthy. This can take the form of campaigning for awareness and respect of trans issues, provision of gender-neutral services and facilities, and (where possible) material support for transitioning students, who face disproportionate financial and temporal burdens. This campaigning must be done in a coalition between women, LGBT+, and trans students due to the tactic of playing protected groups off against each other.